

# Questions from Residents

## Items from the West Resident Association Meeting 3/7/18

### Question: Consultation and involving residents' association representatives

*Resident representatives are concerned that they are not always kept in the loop, involved in the process, or kept informed when improvements and changes are being made in their areas. The two examples given at the meeting were:*

- a) Resident representatives were not informed about the delivery of a new cabinet, ordered by Housing for their community room. Representatives were rung by the delivery person who was outside the block trying to gain access. Neither of the representatives was at home. It caused some confusion and anxiety, which could have been avoided if they had been contacted in advance. This has been raised with Hilary Edgar, and she is trying to sort out a better system with the delivery company.*
- b) The refuse bin at Conway Court has been moved to the front of the building. This followed an inspection by a Housing Officer and a Safety Officer. No one from the Residents Association was invited to the inspection or consulted on the proposed change. There are problems with the new position, which could have been taken into account if local residents had been consulted and involved at the start.*

*It was agreed that poor communication can result in wasted time and energy, and means that the valuable local knowledge that people living in the area have is lost. It is also demoralising for resident representatives if they feel they have been by-passed in the process.*

*It was agreed to ask for improved communication and involvement, so that Residents Associations are always involved in the process and consulted on proposed changes in their area before these changes have been agreed and put into action.*

### Response

Housing's aim is always to keep resident representatives informed on issues that either affect themselves, in terms of their specific role within their association, or all residents in their associations' area of benefit. This commitment is met in different ways; it can be a phone call when something unforeseen happens eg an emergency

repair, or more detailed consultation where work or changes are planned and we want to know residents' views. I am sorry, if on occasion, we do not achieve our aims, and I understand how residents may feel they are being overlooked, although this is never intended. I will now respond to the two specific cases.

- a) Clarendon & Ellen Residents' Association successfully applied for a metal cabinet through the Estates Development Budget. I arranged for this to be delivered directly to their community room and gave contact details for the chair and vice chair of the association to the delivery company, asking for them to make contact in advance of the actual delivery so they could give access. Unfortunately the company only gave notice when on site and neither of the representatives were able to give access. The situation was resolved when I arranged for the cabinet to be delivered to the Housing Centre and then taken to the community room at a time convenient for the representatives. I hope that the Association are happy with this easy solution following the company's oversight.
  
- b) I am sorry to hear that this bin has been moved to a location that is causing residents' dissatisfaction. East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service are unhappy over the proximity of the bins in their current location to buildings on the estate and have asked that they are moved. The bin at Conway Court was moved as it was considered a risk and officers felt action had to be taken immediately to deal with that. This is an example of where consultation is not always possible. A larger piece of work is planned, though, where the location of all bins will be reviewed and alternative locations considered. The new location for the Conway Court bin can be reconsidered as part of this exercise. The Residents Association will be contacted in September about this, in advance of consultation with all residents on the estate.

**Hilary Edgar, Housing Service Operations Manager, Telephone 01273 293250**

## Items from the Central Residents Only meeting 12/7/18

### Question: Recycling problems

*It was noted that problems with recycling are on-going and 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.*

### Response

The group of residents that plan the Citywide Conference have picked up on residents' concerns about environmental issues and have chosen the theme of 'The Environment and Improving our Estates' for this year's conference. City Parks, City Clean and the Estates Service have been invited to attend and the aim of the event is to identify ways that residents and the council can work together to improve the environment and appearance of our estates. All residents are invited to attend and representatives are asked to encourage their association members to come along. It will be held on Friday 19 October between 1.30 and 4.30pm at the Friends Centre in Ship Street.

When this issue was raised at the last Central Area Panel meeting, City Clean offered to help by making sure that signage is correct on recycling containers, if tenants let them know of blocks or estates where there are problems. I would encourage representatives who haven't yet done this to take up their offer. City Clean can be contacted at [CityClean@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:CityClean@brighton-hove.gov.uk) or tel: 01273 292929.

**Hilary Edgar, Housing Service Operations Manager, Telephone 01273 293250**

### Question: Visitors' car parking

*The response given at the last Area Panel was noted, but there was agreement that this did not resolve the problem with abuse of visitors parking bays. It was agreed to raise this again, and to continue to push for a solution that has concrete results.*

*It was also noted that a review of car parking has been taking place over the last two or three years. There was uncertainty about whether this review had actually been concluded or not, and concern that residents had not been kept fully informed.*

*It was agreed to ask for a full report on the car parks review.*

*There was concern that there is no overview or strategic approach to car parking issues, and that the system is broken.*

## **Response**

### **Visitor Parking Bays**

I am sorry to hear that representatives who attended the Residents' Only meeting do not think that the current procedure for dealing with the abuse of visitor parking permits is effective. All reports of abuse are logged and investigated by the Housing Customer Service team and permits rescinded in cases where they are wrongfully used. The Housing Customer Service team will follow up cases where representatives feel this approach isn't working so please do let them have details. They can be contacted at [HousingCustomerServices@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:HousingCustomerServices@brighton-hove.gov.uk) or tel: 01273 293030.

### **Car Parking and Garage review**

Until 2012 there was a small Car Parks & Garage (CP&G) team within the Housing service. When the Housing Customer Service team was set up that year it was decided to incorporate the CP&G team within it so that a wider group of officers could manage CP&G spaces. This work didn't happen on any great scale until late 2016 when one of the Housing Customer Service Team Leaders, Lucie Royall, was seconded to work fully on this integration. There have been two main strands to this work to date:

1. Providing resources and support for the Housing Customer Service team to take on this work
2. Developing a capital works programme for car parks and garages.

Both of these projects have been successfully completed. The Housing Customer Services team now carries out the day to day management of parking schemes in the way that was envisaged back in 2012, and a cross section of officers' work on the capital programme to plan and deliver repairs and new parking enforcement schemes.

The next area of 'car park and garage' work will start in late September and will include a 'task and finish' group of residents and officers to review the management of visitor parking, as part of our work on improving our estates.

**Hilary Edgar, Housing Service Operations Manager, Telephone 01273 293250**

## Question: Drug use in St James's Street area

*The response given at the April Area Panel meeting was noted, but there was unanimous agreement that this has just shifted the problem to other areas, and that more action is urgently needed.*

*It was noted that the Crime Commissioner had spoken at a St James's Street LAT meeting, where the problem was discussed extensively. Following on from that there were increased police patrols for a week, but then it went back to normal.*

*There was considerable concern about the increase in open drug use and selling on the street. Specific problems raised were:*

- *People injecting drugs on the steps of Hampshire Court car park (up to 10 people at one time).*
- *Drug selling and use in Hereford Court car park.*
- *Drug selling and use in Queens Park at night, as well as rough sleepers pitching tents.*
- *Problems around Somerset Point*

*It was noted that piecemeal action is not going to resolve this and it was agreed to ask what the city wide strategy is for tackling the drug crisis in the city and what the priorities are for action.*

## Response

Sadly, illegal drug use in Brighton & Hove continues to rise and as such associated anti-social behaviour and criminal activity is more apparent. Rough sleepers not only stay on the streets or in the parks but also seek shelter in communal areas of our council blocks. They are drawn in from the cold, but are also drawn to areas that are the current "hot spots" for drug dealing. With this in mind it is important for Housing to continually be aware of problematic areas so that action can be taken against anyone involved in drug dealing on Housing land. For instance Housing, with support from Sussex Police, has obtained sixteen Closure Orders in the last three years where it was clear that the council tenant living at these properties were involved in drug dealing. Almost all of these Closure Orders were subsequently followed with successful possession action. This has been made possible since the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 came into force three years ago. Closure Orders form part of the ongoing strategy that has been evolving ever since.

Reports of drug taking in and around council estates should be made to Housing as well as to the Police. Once a report is made to us, we follow a carefully considered procedure designed to help support witnesses and victims of anti-social behaviour

while also obtaining as much information as possible from all parties and agencies. This forms part of a wider strategy that also includes sending reporting letters out to residents with direct contact details; door knocking around estates and, as Annabel addressed in her response to the last Area Panel Meeting item (to be read in conjunction with this response), Housing tackles problems with drugs through various means, such as paying a private security company for nightly patrols of “hot spot” blocks or even for static guards (in one particular case); holding regular multi-agency meetings and appointing case officers to be the point of contact for the residents of each affected block. The main tool that Housing has at its disposal is a solid working relationship with other departments or agencies, the Police being the most significant partner. Each localised tenancy team has a ‘cluster meeting’ once a month to which the Police are routinely invited in order for us all to share information and discuss specific cases and plans of action.

St Mungo’s is another significant partner agency. St Mungo’s is a homelessness prevention organisation that provides outreach services to people who are rough sleeping in England. They do this by going out each night and early in the morning to meet rough sleepers and help them move away from the streets. They manage a national referral line called StreetLink, which is the main service the public can use to report homelessness. This service cannot fulfil its capabilities without reports from the public so people who witness homelessness should be encouraged to report it. StreetLink can be contacted on 0300 500 0914 or via their website [www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk). When Housing receive reports of rough sleepers in a council block we ensure that St Mungo’s are also informed, if not by the reporter then a member of the Housing team will do this. It is important for St Mungo’s to engage with as many rough sleepers as possible to provide as much support as they can, including support to find more appropriate places to sleep.

Of course, not all rough sleepers are drug addicts and not all people taking drugs on the streets are homeless. Brighton & Hove has excellent homelessness services as well as support services for drug users. These include Pavilions and Equinox, an organisation that aims to decrease street presence of drug users, sustain tenancies and reduce harm while helping them work towards recovery.

The Council and the Police both rely on reports from the public in order to turn information into intelligence. It has often been found that people do not report illegal activity as much as they could. On several occasions, a member of the public has stated that they did not report an issue of drug dealing, illegal drug use, or anti-social behaviour to the Police because they do not see the results of their call, which of course becomes a cyclical problem. The Police pinpoint geographical “hot spots” by monitoring the number and type of reports they receive per area. It is vital that people report every incident they witness, or any illegal activity that occurs, though it may seem that no responsive action is taken at the time. But if these reports build up then the Police are able to focus extra resources in said “hot spot” areas. This may,

for example, take the form of extra police patrols or even police raids on particular properties.

Members of the public should report illegal drug use to the Police, either on 999 if it is a matter of urgency or on 101 if it is not. The Police have also advised us that members of the public can call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111, because Crimestoppers have the capacity to log incidents and to refer calls to the Police. I have been asked by the local PC for the Kemp Town area, PC Chapman, to make it clear that as much of the following details should be included in reports: Full description including skin colour and of clothing; age; addresses they are coming in and out of; accents and nicknames/ names overheard being used. As part of an ongoing strategy, details of incidents are available to Housing on request and the two agencies support the actions of one another. This information is useful to Housing as we can take action to ban persistent rough sleepers and drug users from visiting our blocks if we can first identify who they are.

The Council and Police also work closely together to bring about physical improvements to areas to deter drug use and dealing in problem areas. For example this has recently led to Housing funding additional fencing, gates and anti-climb paint in one particular area of Brighton, and to an ongoing upgrade in CCTV systems across the City. Additional lighting in car parks is also something that has been reviewed over the years and continues to be looked at as part of a wider solution.

The Police and Housing recognise the impact that drug dealers and drug use are having on our community as well as on individuals. The Police have been carrying out operations to target drug dealers and gangs across the city, which have proven to be very successful. Unfortunately the high demand in Brighton & Hove for drugs means that new dealers quickly take the place of those arrested. These problems can spread out to the streets so tackling drug dealing is a slow process. The issue of people openly taking drugs in public is a highly visible one but is in fact curbed to some extent by ongoing joint work between all the agencies mentioned, including Housing. Several warrants have been executed recently, resulting in arrests, prosecutions, Closure Orders and, where the perpetrators are council tenants, possession of properties.

In working closely with the Police the aim for both agencies is to get to the root of the problem as much as possible. The success of this strategy rises or falls according to the amount and quality of reports from members of the public. Success also depends on agencies working effectively in partnership with each other and with communities. This is something that Housing and the Police are both committed to delivering for the benefit of residents and wider public.

**John Evans, Housing Officer, Telephone 01273 296669**

**FOR REFERENCE – question and response about this issue at the May Central Area Panel meeting**

## **Drug use in St James' Street area**

*Eileen Stewart said that used syringes have been found in the street by her 4 year old granddaughter. Other used syringes have been found in the bushes and around the bin area, particularly around Warwick Mount. She is concerned that this problem is getting worse, and asked what action was being taken.*

*It was noted that there is a long-term problem with drug abuse in the area, and that all of the Residents Associations regularly raise concerns and ask for action to be taken.*

*If you ring 01273 292929 between 9am - 5pm Monday to Friday, they will collect any hazardous materials within an hour.*

*For the last month St James's House has had security people on the door all night, which has reduced the problem there considerably, but may have moved it elsewhere.*

*Barry Hughes to flag up concerns about drug abuse and connected hazards in the Central Area at the agenda setting meeting. He will also raise it with Councillors.(2\*)*

## **Response**

The council has been addressing the long term problems with drug use in the central area in the following ways: regular multi agency meetings chaired by Rachel Chasseaud, Head of Tenancy Services, and involving the police, tenancy management, the estates team, the property and investment team and substance misuse services amongst other departments and agencies. The focus in these meetings has been on St James House and other central blocks where there it is known that has been a particular problem with rough sleepers getting in, often using drugs in the shared areas. These blocks include Wiltshire House, Kebbell Lodge, Kingswood, and Ashton Lodge. The central tenancy team also focuses on monitoring and trying to find solutions to this problem in liaison with other departments and agencies via their regular team meetings.

Practical measures taken have included - a security guard now located at St James House out of office hours, this arrangement will continue until the problem is much reduced and/or all the planned changes to the security doors have been made. In all of the other blocks mentioned there are thrice nightly security sweeps by our contractors AP security, except in the case of Kingswood where the sweeps are carried out during the daytime hours as these have been identified as the most problematic time. In all these cases the security at the blocks has been checked and



a letter sent to all residents advising them how to report problems day or night. A case officer has been appointed for each block with additional security, case officers keep in touch with relevant residents on a regular basis. Please note however that due to a staff vacancy there has been no named officer for Kingswood for a short period. This will soon be rectified. Finally duty housing officers are now authorised to call AP security to remove rough sleepers/ drug users from the common ways of our blocks. The out of hour's duty officers can also call upon AP security. The central tenancy team works closely with the police officer for Kemp Town, PC Chapman, and together we are focusing on trying to identify drug dealers in the area. Three premises closures have been carried out by the central team in collaboration with the police, including one at Nelson Place as recently as April 19 2018.

Thrice nightly sweeps of the underground car park at St James House have been ongoing for some considerable time. Alterations to this car park are planned.

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

**Annabel Tate, Housing Manager – Central Housing Team: tel: 01273 290677**

## Items from the East Residents Only Meeting 19/7/18

### Question: Laundry Tokens

*Housing have now arranged for laundry tokens to be available from Whitehawk Inn. However, it is only open for limited hours Monday to Thursday.*

*The meeting felt that having tokens available at a local shop, such as the Post Office, which is open for extended hours 7 days a week, would be a better option for residents. Residents have already spoken to the manager who has said he would be happy to do this.*

*The meeting agreed to submit this to the agenda setting meeting, with the proposal that Housing approach the Post Office near Robert Lodge.*

### Response

Thank you for suggesting this alternative outlet for tokens. Karen Woolford, Business Support Manager, is currently following this up with the Post Office in Whitehawk. We will not know the outcome of this until after the deadline for the dispatch of Area Panel papers. However I am hopeful this will be possible and will arrange for the Panel to be update when it meets on 3 September.

**Hilary Edgar, Housing Service Operations Manager, Telephone 01273 293250**

### Anti Social Behaviour in Craven Vale

*Residents in Craven Vale have had ongoing problems with a neighbour for the last 5 years. The tenant concerned is tipping urine over his balcony on a daily basis. The resident who has recently moved in below him has reported it on many occasions without any effective action being taken.*

*Whilst it is understood that the tenant causing the anti-social behaviour may have support needs, the meeting felt that the needs of the resident living below him are not being addressed.*

*Craven Vale Residents Association feel that they have taken all the appropriate action to no avail.*

*The meeting agreed to submit this matter to the Area Panel, with a request that an effective plan be put in place to resolve this matter.*

## **Response**

The East tenancy team are dealing with this issue. It is a sensitive matter with the team taking a balanced approach, supporting the tenant to change his behaviour at the same time as setting out that his tenancy is at risk if he does not. The police have investigated complaints made about the tenant and are not intending to take any further action at this stage.

Housing Officers have regularly visited both the tenant and his neighbours and provided details for residents on who to contact when this happens. The team appreciates how frustrating and unpleasant this situation is for neighbours and will follow up all incidents that they witness.

**Rachel Chasseaud, Head of Tenancy Services, Telephone 01273 291837**

## Items from the North Residents Only Meeting 5/7/18

### Question: Service Provided by the Resident Involvement Team

*It can be very difficult to contact Resident Involvement Officers (RIOs), with residents not getting an answer when they phone and then not getting a response when they leave a message. In addition RIOs do not consistently attend Residents Association meetings.*

*This leaves the Residents Associations feeling unsupported. The meeting felt that this had changed significantly over the last 10 years, with a reduction in the active support provided by the RIOs (formerly Community Participation Officers).*

*An example was given from North Moulsecoomb where there had been problems with their noticeboards. When visiting the area a RIO questioned why there weren't any notices on the Chailey Road noticeboard, although it had been vandalised and was awaiting repair. When Mears did repair it the key provided did not fit correctly. There is an ongoing problem with another noticeboard in Newick Road, which had been repaired but the wrong key was given to the Association. They have been leaving messages for the RIO to try to sort out the problem but are not getting any response.*

*The following information is requested: What improvement in communications and responses can be attained for the RIO teams in better supporting local Resident Associations?*

## Response

### Resident Involvement Officers

The main purpose of the RIO role is to 'promote, develop and facilitate the empowerment of tenants, residents and service users within the council's tenant and community participation and regeneration policies' (*from their job description*). A key strand of this work is for RIOs to ensure that associations are able to function effectively, for example, linking them into the Resource Centre courses on how to be chair, secretary and treasurer, that they have the information they need to contact the council about repairs and other services and they are connected to other parts of the resident movement and are supported to take part in working groups.

RIOs are not expected to attend every meeting of TRAs as these groups are independent from the council. They will however attend periodically to ensure the group is running well and to suggest additional support where it is needed. Where groups have a particular interest eg in fly tipping or anti social behaviour in their area, RIOs can arrange for the relevant Housing Officer to attend meetings.

The Involvement & Empowerment Service Improvement Group has written a handbook for tenant and resident associations which is intended to share good practice amongst tenant groups and help new associations. This will be launched later in the year at an event led by residents on the Involvement & Empowerment Service Improvement Group.

### **Contacting Resident Involvement Officers**

RIOs can be contacted on their individual numbers and via Trevor Jones' number which has an answering service attached to it. These numbers are set out below. The team also has a group email address [RIT@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:RIT@brighton-hove.gov.uk) that all members have access to.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Telephone Number</b>
Hannah Barker	01273 296639
Trevor Jones	01273 294651
Pat Liddell	01273 293374
Rebecca Mann	01273 292365
Keely McDonald	01273 293870

### **Noticeboard Query**

Hannah Barker, RIO, has advised that a representative from the North Moulsecoomb area tried to contact her about keys for noticeboards. Unfortunately she didn't get the messages left on her mobile phone. Hannah has now added a message to her phone that includes other team numbers, if callers want immediate contact. Hannah is working with the North representative to get keys for the noticeboards. I apologise for any delay in resolving this matter and would ask representatives to please use the team email address if you would like to provide any further examples of delays.

**Hilary Edgar, Housing Service Operations Manager, Telephone 01273 293250**

## Question: K&T Heating

*There is an ongoing problem with the installation and repairs service provided by K&T heating.*

*At the January Residents Meeting the following issues were reported:*

- *Problems with the provision and set-up of digital thermostats for central heating boilers*
- *Problems with the emergency call-out service*

*At the April Residents Meeting the following issues were reported:*

- *Incorrect wiring of immersion heaters installed in Elwyn Jones Court.*

*More recently there have been problems with the immersion heaters installed in Nettleton and Dudeney – when resident's water heaters did not work properly they had to wait a week for K&T heating to order a new part, then the wrong part came and they had to wait again.*

*It was acknowledged the K&T heating are providing a very good service in some areas, eg in the servicing of boilers.*

*The following is requested:*

*That K&T Heating review its procedures for the training of staff and ordering of spare parts for boiler and immersion heater repairs.*

## Response

*There is an ongoing problem with the installation and repairs service provided by K&T heating.*

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*It was acknowledged the K&T heating are providing a very good service in some areas, eg in the servicing of boilers.*

*The following is requested:*

*That K&T Heating review its procedures for the training of staff and ordering of spare parts for boiler and immersion heater repairs.*

## **Response**

At the Resident Only meeting various issues around the K&T Heating service were discussed. Unfortunately the notes above, although reflecting discussions at that meeting, include some inaccuracies regarding types of heating and the contractor responsible for their maintenance. Clarification on these issues are included in the response below. Issues raised at previous meetings about K&T Heating have been responded to. If residents have specific questions regarding the responses given below, please let me know.

### **Elwyn Jones Court**

This block has electric heating, not gas.

The majority of Elwyn Jones Court flats had point of use water heaters installed last year, replacing large hot water storage tanks that could potentially have presented a health risk in some circumstances. Point of Use water heaters are so called as water is heated very near to where the water is used and are more efficient than the previous arrangement for the supply of hot water.

The work was carried out by K&T heating. The point of use heaters were not installed incorrectly however due to the change in the electricity supply residents had to pay for this out of their own supply rather than the landlord's as was previously the case. The service charge has now been reduced and a refund is being paid to residents for the period of time that the adjustment was not in place. There have been some issues raised by residents about how effective the new water heaters are and that they may not be able to supply sufficient amounts of water for their needs. We are currently reviewing options to address these issues. We have met with residents at Elwyn Jones Court, and will be meeting with them again in the autumn.

## **Nettleton & Dudeney**

These blocks have communal gas boilers not immersion heaters.

K&T Heating are aware of the time it has taken to replace broken parts. They have therefore changed their suppliers with the aim of establishing a more efficient service in the future. It is not possible for their operatives to carry spare parts for all boilers in their vans as there is a number of different designs in use across the city. However, the most common parts used are kept “on the shelf” at the suppliers along with their engineers having the most popular parts in their vans. Van stocks are reviewed on a monthly basis and are updated regularly to ensure the engineers carry the most commonly used replacement parts.

K&T regularly review their staff training programme to ensure they are up to date with the latest legislation, contract changes and technical requirements.

**Kevin Wilson, Gas Contracts & Compliance Manager, Telephone 01273 294649**