

# Responses to 3 stars (★★★) items from residents only meetings

## September 2020 Area Panel

### EAST

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#### 1. Communication between Council and Residents – How will future meetings work?

North, West, East Question combined.

#### Response

**Sam Warren, Community Engagement Manager. Tel: 07717 303331**

It was agreed that any meeting plans should take into account the health needs of all residents. If there is a return to physical meetings, those who are still shielding and unable to go out should have the option to join them online.

*a) How and when consultation meetings would be re-started and what officers were thinking about this, when will the resident involvement process resume.*

Firstly, thank you for your patience this has been a challenging time for all of us and keeping in touch for some people has been very difficult.

We have tried to have some of the resident involvement meetings online and completed the main round of EDB with online panel meetings. We have also started to have some other meetings such as Tenant groups and the City-Wide Conference meetings online.

In September we will be resuming Area Panels allow this will be an online meeting and will happen in a different format of one main meeting and then four breakout meetings to look at the area-based items. This will be a trial to see if this is an effective way of managing the meeting and approaching the strategic items that have previously come to every Area Panel.

From September onwards we aim to gradually reinstate all the Service Improvement Groups and work with the Leaseholder Action Group, Tenant Disability Network and Tenants' Associations in the best ways for them. We recognise that online meetings can be difficult for some residents and the CEO's have been working with people to ensure they are able to participate. We will be working with the government guidance and most up to date data to see when we can resume some physical meetings.

*When will face-to-face meetings resume?*

As stated above however, the Community Engagement Officers have also had some small physical meetings with groups where there has been the appropriate space to do so i.e. a large room or open space. We will continue to do this as much as possible – keeping up to date on any local outbreak issues.

*The Community Engagement Team have begun to contact some Associations to ask what support they need and have held some outdoor meetings. This was seen as a very positive step. Some Resident Associations did not know this was happening and asked if the plan was to contact all Associations.*

Yes, the plan is to contact all associations and we have been in touch with most, if not all associations now. This information is being used to create North, West, East and Central Plan for the CEO work.

*When will community centres and other community buildings be able to reopen?*

We are working on a document to help all community rooms and buildings understand the requirements to open. The government guidance was updated on the 14<sup>th</sup> August and can be seen in the link below. We have put this into an easy read version and added risk assessment templates for all community rooms to make use of before they consider opening. The CE Team will be working with groups to make sure they are following the guidance.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities>

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## **2. Water ingress to houses in Woodingdean**

*During storm Ciara several houses in Woodingdean had problems with leaking roofs.*

### **Response**

**Marcus Richardson, Survey and Contract Manager. Tel: 01273 291051**

Thank you for your questions.

*How long is the guarantee on new roofs?*

10 years

*What checks are carried out on the condition of roofs?*

Before a roof is replaced we would look at the overall condition of the roof, soffits, fascias and rainwater goods, also taking into account information regarding frequency and types of repairs reported and age of the existing roof covering. After a roof replacement has been carried out, we would check items like the tiles are securely fixed (checking random tiles for movement), ensuring all the ridge or hip tiles are secured and not loose (as they are all now mechanically-screw fixed into

place to meet current building regulations), and ensuring that the soffits, fascias are securely fixed/sealed, and all guttering is installed to a slight fall to enable rain water to adequately drain.

*In what instances would an inspection be carried out in the loft space when there is a leaking roof, to ensure that repairs be done urgently?*

An inspection would only really be carried in a loft space to try and ascertain where a leak was coming from and if there was any internal damage to a roof structure. Repairs to roofs will nearly always involve external repairs, which aren't always visible from within a loft space, unless it is something like renewing a section of breather membrane (felt) under the tiles or repairing a section of the roof structure, as everything else isn't visible from within the loft space.

I hope the above answers are helpful.

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### **3. Co-ordination of repair work between different trades**

*What procedures are in place to ensure there is coordination between trades when one repair is dependent on another, even if they aren't in the same property.*

#### **Response**

**Eddie Wilson, General Manager - Housing Services Tel: 01273 293669**

The process for jobs involving multiple trades and/or more than one property, is for trade teams to notify via written instruction the next relevant trade team when their element of the work is booked and when the work is completed. However, due to low staffing levels there have been some failures to follow this process which we are addressing by recruiting required office-based staff.

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### **4. Right to Buy following succession**

*Please clarify the Council's policy regarding Right to Buy discount when the tenancy has been subject to succession.*

#### **Response**

**Glyn Huelin, Head of Housing – Repairs & Improvement. Tel: 01273 293306**

For cases of succession the years occupying the property as a joint tenant would be taken into account when calculating the potential discount under the right to buy.

For houses – There is a 35% discount if you've been a public sector tenant for between 3 and 5 years. After 5 years, the discount goes up by 1% for every extra year you've been a public sector tenant, up to a maximum of 70% – or £82,800 (whichever is lower).

For flats – There is a 50% discount if you've been a public sector tenant for between 3 and 5 years. After 5 years, the discount goes up by 2% for every extra year you've

been a public sector tenant, up to a maximum of 70% – or £82,800 (whichever is lower).

We are happy to support individual residents with enquiries around right to buy through our Leasehold Services team by email at [rtleasehold@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:rtleasehold@brighton-hove.gov.uk) or by phone on 01273 293074.

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## 5. Laminate flooring in flats

### Response

**Justine Harris, Head of Tenancy Services. Tel: 07795336419**

- *When a flat comes empty that has laminate flooring, what does the Council do?*

This depends on whether it is a house or flat. If a house, it can remain regardless of what floor it is on. If a flat, it can only remain, if on the ground floor. Any laminate above ground floor needs to be removed as per the Tenancy Agreement.

- *Do they remove the flooring and charge the outgoing tenant?*

We would advise the outgoing tenant or representative to remove the flooring and advise that if they do not, they could be re-charged.

- *Do they leave the flooring and ask the new tenant to remove it?*

No. If the previous tenant does not remove then we request it be removed as part of the void works.

- *Is this policy applied consistently or is it applied differently in different situations?*

This policy is applied consistently in respect of the end of tenancy advice we give to outgoing tenants/personal representatives.

- *Do they remove the flooring and charge the outgoing tenant?*

If there is a very sensitive reason for the move we will consider not recharging.

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## 6. Reporting Repairs Online

### East and West Area Question

*The phone line for reporting repairs was directing people to the online form.*

### Response

**Eddie Wilson, General Manager - Housing Services. Tel: 01273 293669**

- a) *When will the phone line for reporting repairs will be working again and if confirmation/updates can be received on repairs.*

The Repairs Helpdesk staff that transferred to the council are relatively new and are still undergoing training and supervision. We are currently recruiting 4 new call agents to join the team and they will also need training and supervision support. This, together with the recruitment of resources in the Response Teams, means that the repairs phone lines cannot be opened yet due to the risk of a major increase in job requests that would be very difficult to process and manage at present.

- b) *Is any support or advice that can be given about reporting repairs in the interim if people don't have access to internet?*

Whilst our IT colleagues continue to investigate the issues with online reporting, if residents are having problems completing the form online or do not have access to the internet, they can still report repairs using the voicemail facility as described on the website.

- c) *What measures are being put in place to ensure that the backlog of repairs will be addressed.*

The Repairs Service are actively recruiting to fill all current vacancies and also the additional vacancies required to complete the large backlog of repairs. Recruiting the required technical staff and providing them with adequate training will take time. Although we have started to book in the backlog of repairs with residents, we do not envisage that the service will return to normal for some months to come

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## **7. Estate Development Budget**

*Residents request an update on all the outstanding EDB work from 2020 with details of when it will be done.*

### **Response**

**Eddie Wilson, General Manager - Housing Services Tel: 01273 293669**

During the last 2-3 weeks we have seen sub- contractors, business's, and labour forces, gradually restarting their own suspended works, due to lockdown in March. The EDB team couldn't issue any work, as none of the bids had been approved at that time, we are now getting to a point where sub- contractors are finishing their work they had before lockdown, and will be accepting EDB work, the EDB team will be issuing approved sub- contractor work from this week and planning in the projects with the appropriate resident association chairs/ contacts.

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## 8. Annual report eviction targets

*What performance targets does the Council have in relation to evictions and an assurance that this won't result in a lack of action when eviction proceedings against nuisance tenants would benefit those impacted by them.*

### Response

**Justine Harris, Head of Tenancy Services. Tel: 07795336419**

The council does not have any specific targets to achieve around evictions, so there is no possibility that action is not taken against tenants in order to achieve a particular target. That said, there is a range of reasons why evictions are used only as a last resort in both nuisance and in arrears cases- most notably the desire to reduce homelessness in the city, and because of the personal and social impacts that arise from someone losing their home.

While we always have to consider the impacts of nuisance on the neighbours who experience it, we will seek to support behaviour change to minimise these impacts and there are a range of interventions that we will consider before eviction. If there are any particular cases that have caused resident representatives any cause for concern, please do contact Justine Harris at [justine.harris@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:justine.harris@brighton-hove.gov.uk).

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## 9. Communal digital TV aerials

*Tenants who pay a contribution to this in with their rent, have not been consulted on the digital TV aerials contract which is out for tender.*

*There were three key concerns about the new contract. It should:*

- *Clearly be for maintenance rather than renewal of the current system*
- *Include a clause that any proposal to install a new system will be independently surveyed and actively tendered for, rather than automatically going to the company that has the contract to maintain the system.*
- *Be short-term as long-term contracts can leave residents with poor service provision that cannot be resolved.*

*Residents request that these issues be considered in the specification of the new contract.*

### Response

**Miles Davidson, Housing Sustainability & Affordable Warmth Manager.**

**Tel: 01273 293150**

Thank you for your comments.

This statutory consultation relates to the re-tendering of the council contract for repair and maintenance of communal digital TV aerials. Only leaseholders pay a variable service charge that are covered by the consultation regulations, secure tenants do not and are therefore not consulted on the procurement of contracts such as this through the Section 20 consultation process.

We do apologise for any confusion from the wording of the consultation letter but we can confirm that the contract will be for repair and maintenance only. The contract to be procured does not cover the installation or replacement of new systems. If any new installs or replacements are required in the future this would be procured separately under the instruction of the Council.

The contract to be procured will be for a period of 3 years with an option to extend for a further 2 years dependent on the satisfactory performance of the contractor.

## WEST

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### 10. Matters arising from the last meeting

#### Concern about Covid 19 in communal blocks

*Residents are not notified when a resident in their block passed away due to Covid. This could have an impact on other residents as there are several shared areas in this block. There was concern that the council had not notified the other residents to ensure they are able to take measures for their own safety.*

#### Response

**Justine Harris, Head of Tenancy Services. Tel: 07795336419**

In general needs housing we do not notify other tenants when a tenant had passed away from Covid-19, or has tested positive. As the virus is in general circulation we all always need to follow the Government advice and that there is every chance of catching this in everyday life. Including from people who are non-symptomatic.

In all of blocks we have undertaken enhanced cleaning throughout the period of the pandemic, this is still continuing. We have taken on additional staff to carry this out.

Residents have also been advised to be mindful and where possible when our staff have been on site to avoid contact. We have also given out additional cleaning packs for those residents who wanted to undertake cleaning to their own front doors and areas directly outside their flats.

In seniors we have written to residents where we suspect a case of COVID19, though we've never disclosed a name and address. We've done this so people are reminded of the COVID basics and are mindful of the symptoms. In a close community setting with communal areas, and where we provide a more managed service, this helps us manage the risk of infection spread.

This approach has been agreed by Public Health Brighton and Public Health England.

Even where we have written we've also made it clear that the responsibility to manage outbreaks is Public Health responsibility – including test & trace responsibilities.

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## **11. Clarification on council offices opening (North and West Area Question)**

*When will Council offices reopen for residents who need to attend in person (for example, when submitting paperwork for housing benefit claims)?*

### **Response**

**Hilary Edgar, Housing Services Operations Manager. Tel: 01273 293250**

The council closed front line offices in line with Government guidance at the end of March 2020. The majority of services have been available for residents since then thanks to the creativity of staff who had little time to plan for these changes.

Officers are now preparing offices for some staff to return to the workplace, however due to the need for social distancing, not all staff will be able to return while coronavirus is still a risk. This will have a knock-on effect on the number of offices that can be opened safely.

We will let residents have a clear timetable of when new, or adjusted, services will be available, including which offices will open, over the coming weeks.

Housing Benefit applications can be made on line, with supporting documents uploaded, or sent by mail to the Housing Benefits team in Bartholomew House. Photocopying and scanning documents for this purpose can also be done in Jubilee and Hove libraries, which are now open.

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## **12. Grass cutting and grounds maintenance (North and West Area Question)**

*Request information on when the full grounds maintenance service will be resumed.*

### **Response**

**Justine Harris, Head of Tenancy Services. Tel: 07795336419**

City Parks have confirmed that the Portslade and Hove Park areas maintenance is on schedule and there has been very little disruption through the period of Covid. There were some issues with service delivery in other areas of the city, full service is now resuming and grass cutting is taking place regularly in all areas.

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## **13. Housing Revenue Account**

*The council has built up considerable debts during the COVID-19 period. There is concern that funds from the Housing Revenue Account could be used to make up some of these lost funds. Residents request an assurance that this will not happen.*



## Response

**Ododo Dafé, Head of Housing Income, Supply & Customer Service.**

**Tel: 07795 336189**

I can reassure residents that funds within the council's Housing Revenue Account can only be spent on goods and services for, or relating to, residents in council housing.

All local authorities, and many council services within them, will be experiencing considerable levels of expenditure as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic that would not have been budgeted for. For Housing, we have also incurred costs that were not previously in our budget. We are still reviewing the current and potential future cost impacts of the pandemic.

# NORTH

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## 14. Disposal of masks, gloves and PPE

*Residents request the Council take action to:*

- *inform the public and care worker agencies of how to dispose of PPE safely.*
- *ensure that all residents requiring care workers to visit their homes are provided with hazardous waste disposal bags and collections.*

## Response

**Rima Desai, Head of Performance, Improvement & Programmes.**

**Tel: 01273 291268**

The PPE working group at the council finalised our new guidance for PPE. This guidance will be sent out to all recipients of PPE and we are working with the communications team to put out some wider communication to the residents.

**Waste management.** BHCC generates various waste types (PPE, cloths, tissues, paper towels etc) with different covid contamination potential and different access to waste stream types and disposal options. In addition, BHCC is mindful of waste minimisation strategies, particularly plastic bags. As such it has been agreed that:

- Waste in care settings or waste generated from any areas/sites with known/suspected covid cases – use yellow/orange bags and associated clinical waste bins or use a double bagged domestic waste bag with 72 hrs storage before final disposal in a household waste bin.
- Home care, domiciliary care or similar support – small amounts of waste can go into the client's waste/pedal bin for disposal into the wheelie or commercial bin later. Larger amounts should be placed into a tied bag and placed into the wheelie or commercial bin once the care provision has finished.

- Children’s services, schools, and LD houses – dispose of items in usual domestic waste sacks but place into wheelie or commercial bin at the end of each working day.
- Offices and general work sites, or mobile teams – dispose of items in usual domestic waste bin/sack and dispose of bags as per usual frequencies

Not everyone in the care sector has clinical waste collection contract but as you will see from the above, not everyone needs it. Those who have this contract and run out of yellow/orange bags, we have been assisting them in providing these bags.

The Community Engagement team will also be working with Homing In to put some guidance out in the next issue.

## CENTRAL

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### 15. Lifts in tower blocks and flats

*A number of concerns were raised about the safety and size of lifts in blocks of flats in Covid times. Request to housing to see what plans they had for ensuring the safety of vulnerable residents when using lifts.*

#### Response

**Miles Davidson, Housing Sustainability & Affordable Warmth Manager.**

**Tel: 01273 293150**

We have been able to instruct our contractor for lifts to install an override button at Warwick Mount, we will be monitoring how this is used and we are conscious that it is not necessarily appropriate for all residents; those with certain disabilities may have difficulty using it.

Unfortunately, not all the lifts in our stock are capable of having this function installed. We will keep it under review and if suitable explore where this option (or other similar options) could be applied where we have reports of ongoing issues that can’t be resolved in another way. We’re also conscious that a function such as this may lead to other problems i.e. residents having to wait longer for lifts as they do not stop at the floor they are waiting on.

#### Notices for lifts

A design brief for semi-permanent notices advising of the need to socially distance in lifts has been sent to the council’s print and design team. At the time of writing we are waiting for example designs to share with residents representatives in the Central Area. The design that gets the most positive feedback will be selected for production and trialled in Warwick Mount. If the signs are effective, they will be available for use in other blocks where there is a need to remind residents to respect social distancing guidelines in lifts.