

## **Communication between the Council and residents**

Residents are very unclear about

- which council services are running and which aren't
- which council offices are open and which staff are back working in the offices
- who to contact in the council when they have an issue

The answer machine message residents get when they phone the council has not changed since the beginning of the Covid 19 period. There is also limited information on the council's website.

There has also been insufficient communication with tenant representatives. Representatives are often the eyes and ears of the Council on estates and have a wealth of knowledge that they are happy to share. They are often aware of those who are vulnerable or need help. However, they have not been given information about who to contact and how to share this information.

It is proposed that the council urgently provide up-to-date information on the location of officers and service delivery to tenant reps and to residents in general.

### **Response from Ododo Dafé, Head of Housing Income, Supply & Customer Service**

Thank you for your comments and suggestion about information to residents regarding council services.

I am sorry that residents are unclear about our services, and while I know that not all residents are on the internet, the Council has published information on the website.

I can assure residents that most council services are running, but they may simply take a slightly different form in order that we comply with Covid-19 guidance, and that we safeguard residents, customers and colleagues.

Our offices are closed to the public, however services are accessible by telephone. In some cases, because many of us are working from our homes, callers may be asked to leave a voicemail message and we will call back, usually within 24 hours.

We will soon update residents with more information in Homing In.

### **Tenancy termination following a tenant's death**

When a tenant dies their relatives are given a very short period of time to empty all their belongings and personal items from their home. This often doesn't take into account the fact that the tenant may have lived in the property for most of their adult life, or the grief that their loved ones are experiencing.

This policy seems to be in contrast to the extended periods of time that some properties are left empty between the termination of one tenancy and the commencement of the next.

The report at the Area Panel stated the average turnaround for empty properties is 20 days.

However, Residents are aware of the length of time some local properties are empty, which is often significantly longer than the average figure.

- a. It is requested that information be provided to the next Area Panel listing all properties that have been empty for more than three months in the last year and the reasons for this. —

**Tom / Ododo to advise**

### **Response from Ododo Dafé, Head of Housing Income, Supply & Customer Service**

Thank you for your question regarding empty homes that have been empty for more than 3 months. In our older version of the Housing Management Performance Report which comes to Area Panels, we used to include a page listing the numbers of homes within each ward that had been empty for 6 weeks or more. In the Quarter 4 report (ie for January to March this year), the total number was 26 homes that had been empty for 6 weeks or more, so fewer would have been empty for more than 3 months.

In the new report, we do not list the number by ward any longer, but we can include a line to give the total number empty for more than 3 months.

For now though, I can confirm that we have an increasing number of homes that have been empty for some time, and the main reason has been because of the delays to repairs and lettings that has resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic.

I am sorry that we do not publish a list of empty properties with the addresses, as this would be in the public domain.

### **Gardening scheme for elderly and disabled tenants – Ododo**

It seems that some disabled tenants are receiving help from this scheme and others are not. There was concern that some people are not receiving the help they are entitled to, possibly because they don't know about the scheme.

The meeting felt that more information was needed on the criteria for receiving help from the gardening scheme, and that more publicity needs to be done so that everybody is aware of it.

Information is requested on the criteria for the Gardening Scheme and what publicity is carried out to ensure all tenants are aware of it.

### **Response from Ododo Dafé, Head of Housing Income, Supply & Customer Service**

Thank you for your question about the gardening scheme, and I am sorry that some eligible residents might not know about it. The scheme is publicised in Homing In when it is opened for applications each year, and we also have information on the Council's website, and on Twitter and Facebook.

The criteria for applying to the scheme is:-

- Anyone over the age of 70, where there is no-one living in the household who can help them with gardening
- People in receipt of Personal Independence Payment, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, and Housing Benefit, again where there is no-one living in the household who can help them with gardening

Before applying tenants need to make sure that they:

- have no legal notices against their tenancy
- are up to date with paying their rent
- do not have an allotment
- are not in the middle of buying their home through the Right to Buy

There are currently 437 tenants on the gardening scheme, and residents can contact the Housing Customer Service team on 01273-293030 if they have any questions, or can get more information and apply to the scheme via the website

<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/get-help-gardening-your-council-home>.

