

West Area Panel March 2021

Resident's Questions

3 Star West

1. Review of policy on Anti-social behaviour:

Issue: Request for further engagement with residents and a review of the council's anti-social behaviour policy.

Background: This item was raised at the November West Area Panel. The written response from Justine Harris (Head of Tenancy) gave lots of information on how the council deals with anti-social behaviour. At the meeting there was also a further verbal report and a helpful offer from Robert Keelan (Housing Manager) for individuals to phone him if they are experiencing problems.

While this was useful, it didn't address the request for a review of the present policy on anti-social behaviour, with full consultation and involvement of residents.

Anti-social behaviour is a big and complicated issue and one that can't be covered adequately at an Area Panel or through a written response.

West Residents are open to suggestions about the best way to move this forward but are asking for a process that involves residents in developing and improving the council's anti-social behaviour policy. One option is a Task & Finish group.

Action: Request for further engagement with residents and a review of the council's anti-social behaviour policy.

Response

Justine Harris – Head Tenancy Services

Thank you for your questions and for raising specific areas of the ASB Policy you would like to see reviewed.

We have listened and will undertake the review as requested. We will start the process to plan for this to happen and hope to start the review in June, this year.

The format of this review will need to be decided but we will consider the option of setting up a task and finish group as residents have suggested. We will include residents in our plans for this review.

2. Maintenance Schedule

Issue: request for review and discussion of the maintenance schedule to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

Background: This issue has been coming up during the discussion about what items can be funded under the Estate Development Budget (EDB). At the last meeting it was acknowledged that EDB funding does get used in a pragmatic way to deal with long delays in the maintenance schedule. The example was given of a community room that badly needs re-decorating but is not due to be done for years, so residents bump this work up the queue by using EDB money.

While this might be the quickest way for residents to get work done, the concern is that it covers up an underlying problem with the maintenance schedule. Why is there a schedule which doesn't reflect the reality of what is needed? If a community room, for example, needs repainting every 5 years why is it scheduled for every 10? If the schedule isn't designed to get maintenance work done when it is needed, then there is a problem with the schedule and this needs to be addressed.

Action: West residents are open to suggestions about the best way to make sure the council has a maintenance schedule that is fit for purpose.

Ideas from the West meeting were that:

- A copy of the current maintenance schedule is made available to Resident Association representatives.
- An officer attends the Resident Only meeting to provide information on the schedule and listen to residents' concerns.
- Further, more detailed work is done in a separate Task & Finish group.

Response

Glyn Huelin - Head of Housing – Repairs & Improvement

Thank you for your question.

In terms of how our planned capital investment programmes are produced, we use a mix of information to produce programmes, gathering details from stock condition survey information on our housing asset database, reported repair information, enquiries and general knowledge of the housing stock from carrying out surveys.

Using this information, we draft provisional programmes for delivery, with the acceptance that these can change if urgent works are identified throughout the year.

Maintenance schedules are useful for managing facilities or smaller projects, for example maintaining a single building, as you can record all the attributes to that building and

determine how long each element has before it requires replacement or repairs. Unfortunately working with housing stock volumes to the extent that the council has, this isn't as straight forward. Collecting the information is a key challenge, but also monitoring that information regularly and allowing for variants which affect the predicted timelines like weathering of buildings, vandalism and general wear and tear of everyday use is difficult.

The other factors to consider are:

- The planned works budget for each type of works programme
- Prioritising works in terms of need and balancing this across the city's housing stock
- Focusing on delivering works to stock across the city
- Timing of works – external works during drier times of the year where possible etc.
- Gathering prices from contractors
- Resident engagement and consultation

At the current time we do not work on a basis of redecorating blocks/community rooms every 'x' amount of years, as this isn't always deliverable, so internal decoration is in line with the priorities above and is based on need. The timelines for these works can also be affected by vandalism, repair issues within blocks like water leaks etc, which can change the anticipated timescale that work is required. The council has over 600 blocks with common ways throughout its housing stock, ranging from converted houses/maisonettes, low, medium and high-rise blocks of flats.

Going forward Property & Investment will work with the Community Engagement Team to get a comprehensive list of all the community rooms through the housing stock (as some of these aren't always within blocks), and contact details. When we have this, we will start surveying them to assess their current condition, and when they will require decoration.

3 Star East

3. Anti-Social behaviour

Issue: It is recognised that anti-social behaviour can be very difficult to resolve and can be a long process involving a lot of input from those impacted by it. However, improvements could be made in the way reports are responded to, action taken by officers and outcome reporting to Area Panels.

Background:

The following issues were discussed:

Reporting:

Statistics provided to Area Panel do not give a clear picture of the number of ongoing cases or success in resolving them. It would be more useful to receive information about the number

of active cases, how many have been successfully resolved in the last quarter, and the average length of time it takes to resolve cases.

Addressing the range of different tenants living on estates

Residents in Craven Vale repeatedly reported anti-social behavior by a resident on the estate for nearly a year, before they eventually found out that the perpetrator was in Temporary Accommodation. This meant it was the responsibility of the Temporary Housing Team to deal with the issue, rather than the anti-social behavior officers. This caused unnecessary delays.

Moving the victims of anti-social behaviour

Living with anti-social behaviour can be very traumatic and sometimes a victim will feel the need to move away to make a fresh start. This can take a very long time, which can have a detrimental impact on those concerned.

Review of anti-social behaviour policy

The meeting discussed the item put forward to Area Panel by the West Residents Meeting and was in agreement that a review of the council's anti-social behaviour policy and procedures is necessary. An example was given of how anti-social behaviour is often not dealt with effectively. In Woodingdean, a tenant reported having human excrement smeared on their front door. This was not an isolated incident but was part of an ongoing case of anti-social behaviour they had been reporting for over a year. They were asked to clean off the excrement themselves, rather than having action taken against the perpetrator.

Residents would like to request the following:

- Housing Performance indicators reported to Area Panel to include details on: the number of active cases; how many have been successfully resolved in the last quarter; and the average length of time it takes to resolve cases.
- The setting up of a single point of contact (SPOC) for all reports of anti-social behaviour on council estates that will deal with tenants with secure council tenancies, Temporary Accommodation tenants, Housing Association tenants, private tenants and any other residents.
- When victims of anti-social behaviour are being moved they should be given high enough priority to be able to move quickly.
- A full review of the council's anti-social behaviour policy as requested by West Area Residents' Meeting

Response

Justine Harris – Head Tenancy Services

The next performance report, which will go to Area Panels in March 2021, has been amended to include three new indicators relating to the anti-social behaviour (ASB) caseload, in addition to the number of new cases which was already included in the report. The data has been reproduced in the table below:

ASB caseload indicators in performance report to March Area Panels	Q2 2020/21	Q3 2020/21
New ASB cases reported	209	155
Closed ASB cases	182	176
Average days taken to close ASB cases	111	112
Active ASB cases (quarter end)	311	290

As per the response to the request for a review of policy on ASB from West Area Panel, we will be undertaking a review. The format of this review will need to be decided but we will consider the option of setting up a task and finish group as residents have suggested. We will include residents in our plans for this review. We will start the process to plan for this to happen and hope to start the review in June this year.

This will include reviewing the setting up of a single point of contact (SPOC) for all reports of anti-social behaviour on council estates regardless of tenure and the priority given to victims of ASB when they need to move.

4. Delays in letting empty properties

Issue: A property in Woodingdean has been empty for a year and the council has been unable to collect rent, there have been works carried out which residents feel are unnecessary and avoidable. Some have been delayed because kitchens have not yet been included as part of the repairs contract.

Information is requested on:

- What is the process in ensuring that any re-letting works carried out are necessary and of a good standard?
- When will kitchens be included in the repairs contract and what system is in place until then?
- How much has the renovation cost including lost rent?
- What is the process in letting empty properties during Covid?

Response
Eddie Wilson | General Manager | Housing Services

We are very sorry for the length of time it is taking to complete the empty homes works to this property which has not been. The main reasons for the delay was due to a backlog of empty homes work built up during Covid restrictions and not having contractors procured for the larger works. We now have contractors in place and are progressing with the empty homes requiring larger works.

Please be assured all works to this property are as per the empty homes mechanical specification / health and safety requirement, and therefore deemed necessary. Sometimes a property can appear in very good condition, but only when works are started health and safety issues are identified. The kitchen was replaced as it contained integral appliances that we are required to remove, which left little of the kitchen. When we started to remove the kitchen appliances, we identified that the electrical wiring did not meet current safety standards and a rewire was required. Please be advised that the new kitchen and rewire are now completed.

The bathroom has not been ripped out, we have replaced the w.c as it was leaking and the floor tiles as were are required to fit non-slip vinyl in bathrooms, a H&S requirement. We removed the laminate flooring in the hallway in order to remove the floor tiles underneath that contained asbestos. We removed the laminate flooring the living room as once the fireplace was removed (empty homes specification) the flooring was uneven and a trip hazard.

Unfortunately, serious structural defects with the loft have been identified, which will require extensive steel re-enforcement works. These works will take some time as bespoke steel joists need to be manufactured and an opening in the roof will need to be made in order to transport the joists into the loft.

Please be assured we are working to arrange these works as quickly as possible.

Process for Letting Empty Properties.

- Rehousing staff follow risk assessments to mitigate the risk from COVID-19 for themselves and residents.
- The team use masks, gloves and sanitiser and have extra masks and sanitiser available at the viewing and sign up for the prospective customer if required
- On the day of the appointment for the viewing the prospective tenant is contacted to check they aren't showing any signs of Covid-19 symptoms. If they do the appointment is cancelled and rebooked later.
- Property viewings are to only be conducted with one household at a time, with a maximum of two people from one household in attendance.
- On arrival at the property the Rehousing officer goes into the property alone in order to carry out a visual health & safety check and open windows for ventilation. The Rehousing Officer and prospective customer will approach the property separately, e.g customer might use the lift and Officer use the stairs

- The prospective tenant(s) will enter the property to do the viewing alone and the Re-housing Officer will remain outside the property door. They are instructed not to touch any surfaces in the property or open any cupboards or drawers
- Sign up to the tenancy is carried out at the Housing Centre in a Covid safe interview room which has screens that divide each side of the desk.
- Where possible paperwork is filled in prior to the new tenant coming into the office to minimise time spent with them.
- Keys are handed over in a sealed envelope and pens are not shared.

3 Star Central

5. Renewal of Knightguard contract

Issue: Central residents are opposed to the recent renewal of the contract for door-entry systems with Knightguard.

Background: Residents have consistently raised problems about work done by Knightguard. Why have these concerns been ignored, and why does the Council consider this contract to be sound?

Action: Request for Miles Davidson (mechanical and electrical) to attend the next Area Panel to explain why the Knightguard contract has been renewed. This should be an agenda item for discussion at the next Area Panel (not just a written response).

Response

Glyn Huelin - Head of Housing – Repairs & Improvement

The scoping of a new procurement for Door Entry Systems and CCTV (the services currently delivered by Knightguard) will begin over the coming months, and residents will be consulted through this process in addition to statutory leaseholder consultation. In addition, approval from Housing Committee will also need to be sought on any contract(s) with an estimated value over £500,000. After authority to procure has been given the procurement activity including any required consultation with residents can take up to 9-12 months.

Providing a good servicing, maintenance and installation service for our door entry systems is critical for residents with systems in their blocks. Undertaking a procurement process is a significant undertaking and must be planned and undertaken in line with governance and legal requirements. As detailed above this process will be starting in the coming months.

The existing contract with Knightguard for the maintenance, servicing and installation of Door Entry Systems and CCTV has been extended in line with the original contract terms and council standing orders for a further two years up to January 2023. We carefully consider how contracts are performing alongside considering extension arrangements.

Residents have raised questions about how this particular contract operates and the council has been clear in communicating that the decisions around what replacement work is controlled by direct council staff and the contract is operating correctly. Performance is regularly reviewed, and this contract is performing well.

A significant number of our specialist contracts have required re-procurement over the last few years including a number of contracts without extension options and new contracts being procured and mobilised for Planned Works Programme and Major Projects. At the same time the Repairs & Maintenance service has been brought in-house.

3 Star North

6. Fencing to individual homes and blocks

Issue: Many fences have blown down in the recent bad weather and some tenants cannot afford to replace them.

Background:

Heather reported that due to extreme weather many fences have blown down in the Coldean area. Some of the tenants are on very low incomes or benefits and cannot afford to replace the fences themselves. This affects the tenants, but also makes the estate look very untidy. Heather has some examples that she is happy to provide if requested. It is recognised that this is a problem throughout the city, and not just in Coldean, so this is being submitted as a 3 star item.

Action: Residents would like the Council to reconsider the guidelines for the Estate Development Budget, to enable bids to be submitted for the renewal of fences for individual tenants and small blocks of flats.

Response

Justine Harris – Head Tenancy Services

The Area Housing Teams have a small allocated budget for fencing each year. Although, maintenance of boundary fencing is the responsibility of Tenants it is understood that this is difficult for many due to associated high costs.

Where tenants struggle to fund repairs of boundary fencing they can ask the council to help out by contacting Housing Customer Services. They will be asked to clarify the following –

- Does the fence back on to a public foot-path
- Does the fence provide a safe space for children within the household to play?
- Other extenuating reasons why the fence needs attention.

This is left quite open to allow us to consider a wide area of discretion and has been used for such things as enhancing security, difficulties in maintaining effective boundaries, neighbourhood conflict and financial considerations/affordability.

The Area Team budgets are small and will have to focus on repairing and replacing fences that have a high impact. Some requests may need to wait for the next financial year and some will need further funding if the costs of replacement are very high.

Bids for fencing to individual properties to the Estates Development Budget (EDB) were stopped in 2020/21 following a review by a 'start and finish' group made up of residents and the then Resident Involvement Team and a report to Area Panels. There were two main reasons for making this change:

- Schemes funded this way brought limited environmental improvement as the work was not usually carried out to consecutive properties.
- Unlike other work funded through the EDB, fencing is a tenants' responsibility, unless there are exceptional circumstances where the budget above can assist.

Both points led to the conclusion that these types of bids were not consistent with the council's need to make sure its resources are used well and in a fair way.

This decision did not alter fencing bids from blocks of flats and these types of bids can still be made to the EDB.

Following this decision research was carried out on how other social landlords provide fencing. This found a wide range of practices ranging from not providing fencing, to doing so on a discretionary basis, like our current practice, and providing post and wire fencing at the point of letting. There are plans to review the council's Lettable Standard which will include an Environmental Standard. We will therefore include consideration of how to provide fencing to individual properties inconsistent and fair way as part of this work.

