

HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 72
Brighton & Hove City Council

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

3.00pm 13 DECEMBER 2010

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Mears (Chairman); Allen, Fallon-Khan, Fryer, Simpson (Opposition Spokesperson) and Simson.

Tenant Representatives: Ted Harman (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), David Murtagh (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), John Melson (Central Area Housing Management Panel), Stewart Gover (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), David Avery (West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel), Chris Kift (Hi Rise Action Group), Muriel Briault (Leaseholders Action Group), Tom Whiting (Sheltered Housing Action Group) and Barry Kent (Tenant Disability Network)

Apologies: Councillors Caulfield and Pidgeon, Jean Davis, Beryl Snelling, Heather Hayes and Trish Barnard.

PART ONE

57. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

57A Declarations of Substitute Members

57.1 Councillor Fallon-Khan declared that he was attending as a substitute for Councillor Barnett. David Avery declared that he was attending as a substitute for Beverley Weaver.

57B Declarations of Interests

57.2 Councillor Simpson and Ted Harman declared a personal interest in any discussion on the LDV as they are Board Members of Brighton and Hove Seaside Community Homes (the Local Delivery Vehicle).

57C Exclusion of the Press and Public

57.3 In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

57.4 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

58. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

58.1 *Strategic Directors* - Tom Whiting congratulated the council on appointing the Strategic Directors. He considered this was a good move and should make a difference. The Chairman said she would pass on these comments. She reported that Geoff Raw, the Strategic Director Place, had asked to be introduced to Housing Consultative Committee members.

58.2 *LDV Express consent* - Councillor Allen referred to paragraphs 50.19 and 50.20. He asked if the Housing Minister had given the green light for express consent. The Chairman replied that the Strategic Director, Place would be sending paperwork to the Minister.

58.3 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2010 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

59. CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS**Ainsworth House**

59.1 The Chairman thanked tenants' representatives on the Building New Council Homes Working Group for their work in development of plans for building new Council homes on the Ainsworth House site.

59.2 A meeting of the Tenant Working Group the previous week had viewed final plans which would form part of the planning application which the architects now proposed to submit to planning.

59.3 Officers would make these drawings available to interested parties after the meeting & arrange for briefings as required.

59.4 As agreed with tenants, scheme proposals provided 15 new affordable homes, including 3 x 4 bedroom houses and 2 fully wheelchair accessible homes and met the code for Sustainable Homes L4. The plans even included two mobility scooter storage areas added following tenant consultation.

Estates Masterplan

- 59.5 The Chairman reported that the estates masterplan was being developed to inform best use of HRA assets and enable Members to have an informed discussion about future HRA investment choices and opportunities. This would enable the development of strategic options taking into account: development opportunities; stock condition and social factors such as the Reducing Inequities Review. This would in turn enable identification of potential sites for new Council housing or new build mixed tenure opportunities. In all, development sites with potential for over 800 units were identified.
- 59.6 The Head of Housing Strategy and Development & Private Sector Housing reported that Ainsworth House was considered the most important site. Other sites would also be considered.
- 59.7 The Lead Commissioner Housing reported that Ainsworth House was being used as a model to see what could be achieved.
- 59.8 John Melson believed that the tenants' involvement had been lost in the process. He was concerned that local involvement should be stronger. Even though good work had been achieved, he thought that the current working group should not be involved in the whole city. He suggested that a working group should be set up after Christmas that was more representative of the whole city. He was also concerned about the Localism Bill. This would bring about fundamental changes in the way the council operated.
- 59.9 The Chairman replied that she was happy to broaden the group, however it was important to realise that the work was about increasing council homes.
- 59.10 Stewart Gover agreed that the group who worked on the next site identified for building should consist of tenants' representatives who lived in the area.

Energy Efficiency Investment Opportunities Update

- 59.11 The Chairman reported that the council was working with tenants to ensure that it could maximise the potential benefits of energy company investment to improve council homes and offer lower fuel costs to tenants. As advised at previous HMCC & Area Panel meetings, the council were currently undertaking an options appraisal of the opportunities available such as Feed in Tariffs.
- 59.12 The Council were proposing to expand the options appraisal to include working with other councils from the existing partnership groups such as Brighton & Hove & East Sussex Together (BEST) private sector renewal partnership, where this would enable economies of scale to be realised through joint working, for example on joint procurement of installations.
- 59.13 The last Energy Efficiency Working Group meeting was disrupted by snow so it was proposed to update HMCC Committee members on progress with a presentation at the end of the meeting, if there was time.

Local Delivery Vehicle

- 59.14 The Chairman reported that following Council acceptance of the response to offer from the LDV, Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes supported by its financial

advisors had developed its business plan for issue to potential funders. A series of meetings had taken place with all funders on the list. Discussions were ongoing with five banks with indicative terms being received from one and further terms expected from a number of other funders within a week.

Local Decisions: A Fairer Future for Social Housing – Consultation Paper

- 59.15 The Chairman reported that the Government was consulting on reform of social housing and shift of power from Westminster to councils and communities. The proposed reforms were outlined in a consultation paper “Local Decisions: a Fairer Future for Social Housing”. This document outlined a number of proposals and questions about the way these new powers were likely to be exercised. There would be a presentation on the consultation paper later in the meeting. In order to incorporate tenants’ views into the consultation response, the Chairman invited tenants to a consultation meeting in early January. The date for submitting responses was Monday 17 January 2011.
- 59.16 Councillor Simpson expressed concern that the consultation period was so brief and questioned how people would have time to comment in the timescale.
- 59.17 Stewart Gover suggested meeting informally with as many councillors as possible before the consultation deadline.
- 59.18 John Melson suggested having a combined focus group with members from each party and the Lead Commissioner for Housing.
- 59.19 The Lead Commissioner Housing stated that he would arrange a meeting with tenants before the 17 January to discuss the consultation document.

60. CALLOVER

- 60.1 The Chairman asked the Committee to consider which items listed on the agenda it wished to debate and determine in full.
- 60.2 **RESOLVED** - That all items be reserved for debate and determination.

61. PETITIONS

- 61.1 There were none.

62. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- 62.1 There were none.

63. DEPUTATIONS

- 63.1 There were none.

64. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 64.1 There were none.

65. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

65.1 There were none.

66. A FAIRER FUTURE FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

66.1 The Committee received a presentation from the Head of Housing Strategy and Development on Local Decisions: a Fairer Future for Social housing Consultation Paper. The consultation on the paper ended on 17 January 2011.

66.2 Stewart Gover commented that he agreed with the Tenant Services Authority's demise. However he wanted to know who would now be the regulator to deal with problems such as damp accommodation. The Chairman replied that the Localism Bill was about devolving power down to tenants. Issues such as damp should be brought to the attention of the Lead Commissioner Housing or the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion.

66.3 John Melson reported that he understood that the Homes and Communities Agency would be the new regulatory body. He was hoping to see a Residents' Scrutiny Panel.

66.4 The Chairman and Councillor Fallon-Khan both commented that they would like to see less use of abbreviations such as HCA. Councillor Fallon-Khan stated that he supported decentralisation. He asked the Head of Housing Strategy who would regulate performance and how local tenants and members could be involved and scrutiny become more robust.

66.5 The Head of Housing Strategy and Development & Private Sector Housing replied that the consultation paper suggested a clear change from an inspection approach to a more local approach.

66.6 John Melson stated that there was a problem with scrutiny. Council staff could not be held to account. This needed to be investigated. A scrutiny panel needed to be made up of a tenants' representative, a council officer, and other independent members. Tenants were looking at a model in Cambridge.

66.7 The Chairman stressed that the council had the Intelligent Commissioning model. The Lead Commissioner Housing would scrutinise Housing Management. There would be a different way of bringing scrutiny forward.

66.8 Councillor Simpson stated that it was an interesting consultation paper, with wide-ranging implications. It removed the regulator and gave power to local decision makers. She stressed that with freedom came responsibility. She was concerned that not all local authorities would make a good choice. It was important that there was a clear response.

66.9 The Chairman stated that she would listen to and support tenants.

66.10 Councillor Fallon-Khan remarked that it was necessary to trust Members and tenants to deal with local needs. The proposals would mean that the Government would not be

informing the council how to manage the City and local people would make their own decisions.

- 66.11 Councillor Simpson made the point that tenants might have great influence in Brighton & Hove, but this did not exist everywhere. The government had come forward with a proposal for fixed term tenures of only two years. Housing Associations would have shorter term tenancies at a maximum of 80% of local market rents. With regard to homelessness, the council would not have to offer a secure tenancy. She doubted if many tenants could support those proposals.
- 66.12 Ted Harman stated that many council tenants respected councillors and also hoped they respected the tenants. However, he considered that many council staff members did not respect tenants.
- 66.13 The Chairman suggested Mr Harman gave names and departments of the staff concerned to the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion to take appropriate action. She did not expect housing officers to treat tenants with disrespect.
- 66.14 **RESOLVED** – That the presentation and the comments of the Committee be noted.

67. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE REVIEW - PROGRESS REPORT

- 67.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director, Place which set out the progress on the review of the grounds maintenance service on housing management owned land. The revised specification for the grounds maintenance service was being developed with CityParks using pilot locations to test and cost out the service improvements. It was necessary to extend the lifetime of the project with a view of having a fully revised and computerised specification by October 2011.
- 67.2 The Committee further received a presentation from the Housing Manager and David Murtagh.
- 67.3 Tom Whiting considered the display of wild flowers along the A27 into Moulsecoomb to be very impressive. Meanwhile he was aware of many nesting sites that needed nest boxes, for example on new builds. There was a shortage of nest sites for house sparrows as new houses were built without eaves.
- 67.4 The Housing Manager explained that one of the first pilot schemes was carried out at Nettleton & Dudeney. An area was identified for placing bird boxes to attract wildlife. The questionnaires received back had shown that residents were in support of this work.
- 67.5 Councillor Simpson thanked tenants for carrying out this important review. It would instil confidence in tenants to know that the grounds would be managed in the right way.
- 67.6 Councillor Fryer thanked everyone involved in the review. She asked about further phases in the review. The Housing Manager replied that all phases were complete. They now needed to be evaluated and costed.
- 67.7 Councillor Fryer noted reference to the Harvest Brighton & Hove vegetable growing project in the report. She hoped all tenants would be informed about this project.

- 67.8 The Housing Manager mentioned that there was a compost bin on one site. Large amounts of green waste could be removed by City Parks by prior arrangement on community action days. David Murtagh remarked that a group had been set up to deal with composting and green waste. The group was looking for new members. The first meeting would take place in January.
- 67.9 Stewart Gover praised the Housing Manager (Graham Page) for his work on the review and asked for his thanks to be recorded.
- 67.10 Councillor Allen considered the work carried out to be excellent, but referred to the issue of grass cutting. He mentioned that grass was not always cut on council land. Highcroft Lodge was an example. He was surprised that grass being cut on a regular basis was not mentioned in the review.
- 67.11 Chris Kift mentioned that he was aware that tenancies stated that people should not attract birds and that some people were clearly breaking their tenancy agreements. The Chairman stressed that tenants should use common sense regarding this matter. Serious issues had arisen where tenants had attracted seagulls and large birds onto balconies. As a result, other tenants on lower floors had been unable to use their balconies. It was important that all tenants should be able to enjoy their properties.
- 67.12 Barry Kent mentioned a problem with overhanging hedges and slippery pavements due to paths not being cleared.
- 67.13 Tom Whiting stressed that cutting grass was expensive. He mentioned that the city had fast growing grasses. He suggested, as an economy measure, using slow growing grass which only needed cutting twice a year. These grasses were readily available. He would give the Housing Manager the name and address of the producer. He thanked the Housing Manager and David Murtagh for an excellent piece of work.
- 67.14 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the report and the above comments be noted.

68. HOUSING MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT (QUARTER 2)

- 68.1 The Committee considered a report of the Head of Housing & Social Inclusion which set out the Housing Management Performance for the year 2010-2011.
- 68.2 Councillor Simpson referred to paragraph 3.4.0 relating to the routine repairs completed. There appeared to be a marked difference in the figures. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion replied that he would investigate the figure of 21,121. A large amount of money was being invested in the housing stock and repairs might be followed up as part of that investment. He was aware that 14,000 repairs had been carried out in the first 14 months of the partnership.
- 68.3 John Melson noted that the average time to complete routine repairs was 12 days in 09/10. The target for 10/11 was 15 days. He asked for an explanation. Were officers expecting less of Mears Ltd?

- 68.4 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion explained that 15 days was a contractually binding target. It was a tougher target than the target set for the previous company. He would look to set a more challenging target for next year.
- 68.5 John Melson congratulated officers on improvements in the council's stock. He commented that council tenants received a yearly gas certificate asked if there was a requirement for leaseholders to have evidence of a gas certificate.
- 68.6 The Contract Compliance Manager replied that there was no local requirement for leaseholders to carry out gas safety checks. The council would not have to carry out checks as landlord.
- 68.7 The Lead Commissioner Housing reported that if the leaseholder was letting the flat there would be a requirement to carry out a gas check. There was no requirement if the leaseholder was living in the flat.
- 68.8 John Melson replied that he was not reassured by that answer. He considered that the council had a duty of care to tenants, and should ensure that any properties adjacent to council properties should have gas checks.
- 68.9 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that Mears Ltd would soon have a role in offering gas services.
- 68.10 Muriel Briault confirmed that it was the leaseholders' responsibility to have gas checks. She arranged for her boiler to be serviced.
- 68.11 David Murtagh commented that home insurances would not remain valid if gas checks were not carried out.
- 68.12 The Chairman considered the points raised were valid concerns and suggested officers contact leaseholders to raise attention to the problem.
- 68.13 Councillor Simson referred to paragraph 3.6.0 relating to estate services. It was important that targets for cleaning tasks, bulk refuse removal and graffiti removal were maintained. David Murtagh mentioned a house close to his home where rubbish was piled in the garden. The Chairman asked him to give details to the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion.
- 68.14 Councillor Fryer referred to discussions at tenants meetings regarding the possibility of upgrading rather than replacing doors. She asked for more information.
- 69.15 The Contract Compliance Manager reported that doors would be upgraded to make them fire compliant at less cost. There had been a pilot with leaseholders and this would be carried out across the city.
- 69.16 Ted Harman expressed concern about cases where tenants required new kitchen worktops and were given a whole new kitchen. He considered this a waste of money. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion agreed and asked for details of these cases.

- 69.17 John Melson raised concerns about cleaning in high rise blocks. The Chairman commented that some parts of the city received excellent cleaning services, and agreed that there should be consistency in high standards across the city. Meanwhile, follow ups were not being carried out in relation to decent homes work. There had been numerous complaints about work not being finished properly. The Contract Compliance Manager would investigate these complaints. The Chairman suggested that if there were issues, tenants should inform the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion.
- 69.18 The use of asbestos in council homes was raised. Barry Kent mentioned that the black Marley tiles used in kitchens were made of asbestos. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that very small amounts of asbestos were used in the tiles and they would not be a health hazard. Councillor Simpson asked if tenants were aware that they should not attempt to remove the tiles. The Chairman agreed that this matter should be monitored.
- 68.19 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the report be noted.

69. WORKING HOUSEHOLDS LETTINGS PLAN PILOT REVIEW

- 69.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director, Place which presented the findings of the review of the Working Households Local Lettings Plan Pilot. The Working Household Local Lettings Plan was agreed on a pilot basis by the Cabinet Member for Housing in July 2009. The pilot was to advertise 25% of all properties which were 2 bedrooms and above within the 9 most deprived areas of the city, to working households.
- 69.2 In November 2009 the Cabinet Member for Housing agreed to amend the pilot so that 50% of properties of 2 bedrooms and above were advertised for working households. Analysis of the first 12 months of the pilot had been undertaken. The evaluation of the pilot had demonstrated that under the pilot scheme there was a broader spread of properties allocated within each band to working households. A full analysis of the impact of the Local Lettings Plan was in Appendix 1 to the report.
- 69.3 Stewart Gover reported that he had worked on the pilot and the data showed it to be an unqualified success. He wanted people to feel that they would not be stuck on the housing list forever if they had a job. Having a cap of a total of £35,000 for a family income was achievable and reasonable. However, he would be minded to slightly ease the figure of 50% of properties of 2 bedrooms and above that were advertised to working households.
- 69.4 Councillor Simson agreed that the pilot had been a success and was the right way to go forward; however, she stressed that it would take a long time for the changes to have an effect.
- 69.5 Councillor Simpson expressed doubts about the policy. She was concerned at the increase of 50% across the whole city. The report acknowledged that the benefits could only be achieved over a long period. She felt this was not advantageous to the most vulnerable. Although people in Band C & D were being housed, fewer people were being housed in Band A. She questioned whether it was necessary to have the policy applied across the city and mentioned that some estates like Coldean were very mixed.

- 69.6 John Melson mentioned that his association did not support the proposals. Working households could not be grafted onto communities. He believed that if there was to be sustainable building projects in the city then there needed to be a mix of social and council housing. He considered the £35,000 figure for working households was ridiculous. Most people in need of housing had a much lower income. Meanwhile he expressed concern about the people in high medical need who were still waiting to be housed as shown in appendix 1.
- 69.7 The Chairman mentioned that there were cases where accommodation was offered on many occasions and turned down. John Melson agreed that people should accept a reasonable offer of housing.
- 69.8 Ted Harman remarked that 50% figure was aimed at people on low incomes. He stressed that many people on low incomes could not afford private rents.
- 69.9 David Murtagh reported that his tenant's association were in favour of the proposals. They agreed with the 50% figure and felt that more working households would improve the community spirit.
- 69.10 The Chairman referred to the information in Appendix 1 relating to people in high medical need who were still waiting to be re-housed. She would speak to Councillor Caulfield about setting up a small working group to investigate why there were these anomalies in the pilot. She knew that some people were not prepared to move.
- 69.11 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That consideration be given to setting up a working group to investigate anomalies in the pilot.

70. HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- 70.1 The Committee considered a brief presentation from the Head of Housing Strategy and Development. Due to lack of time the Committee were shown one slide which showed that Brighton & Hove Council were well positioned to benefit from Feed in Tariffs. Under this scheme energy suppliers have to make regular payments to householders and communities who generate their own electricity from renewable or low carbon sources such as solar electricity panels or wind turbines. The full set of slides was distributed to Committee members.
- 70.2 The Chairman commented that the slides clearly showed that the council could work with neighbouring authorities to work more efficiently.
- 70.3 Councillor Simpson welcomed the initiative. She asked if it was the case that solar panels only worked effectively with south facing roofs.
- 70.4 The Chairman replied south facing roofs would gain the most savings from solar energy. However, it was still possible to make savings from roofs that were not south facing.
- 70.5 Stewart Gover stated that it was possible for properties which were not south facing to have solar heating with the use of parabolic mirrors.

70.6 **RESOLVED** – That the presentation be noted.

The meeting concluded at 5.45pm

Signed

Chairman

Dated this

day of

