

Agenda item 36

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2.00PM 3 NOVEMBER 2011

COMMITTEE ROOM 1, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors K Norman (Chair); Buckley, Gilbey, Jones, Robins, A Norman and Brown

Co-opted Members: Lister (LINKs) (Non-Voting Co-Optee)

PART ONE

22. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

22A Declaration of Substitutes

22.1 Cllr Vanessa Brown attended as substitute member for Cllr Wealls

Cllr Ann Norman attended as substitute member for Cllr Peltzer Dunn

Cllr Alan Robins attended as substitute member for Cllr Turton

Cllr Alex Phillips sent her apologies.

22B Declarations of Interest

22.2 There were none.

22C Declarations of Party Whip

22.3 There were none.

22D Exclusion of Press and Public

22.4 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.

22.5 **RESOLVED** – that the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

23. DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 08 SEPTEMBER 2011

23.1 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 08 September 2011 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

24. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

24.1 The Chair informed members that planning was underway for a scrutiny workshop on the issue of community meals, and invited members to a tasting session of community meals organised by the meals provider, WRVC.

24.2 The Chair told members that he had recently undertaken a tour of parts of the city on a mobility scooter in an attempt to appreciate the difficulties encountered by people reliant upon scooters. This experience had made the Chair aware that there were still significant problems of accessibility, particularly in terms of the placing of street furniture, including business 'A' boards.

25. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

25.1 There were none.

26. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

26.1 There were none.

27. NOTICES OF MOTIONS REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

27.1 There were none.

28. MEMBERS DEVELOPMENT SESSION - EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY

28.1 This item was introduced by Martin Reid, Head of Housing Strategy, and by Emma Kumar, Empty Property Officer.

28.2 In answer to a question about the difficulties associated with tracing ownership of empty properties, members were told that this was not generally a problem: Council Tax has an up to date record of property ownership, and there are very competent tracing agents available for properties that Council Tax does not have records for.

28.3 In response to a query about the number of empty properties in the city, members were told that on 01 November 2011 there were 954 long term empty properties in Brighton & Hove (defined as vacant properties not eligible for a Council Tax exemption). However, experience showed that a number of these properties would be rolled over in the next few months: 539 properties had been empty for more than 12 months, and this was a more accurate reflection of empty property rates in the city. Of these vacant properties, 291 were owned by private individuals, the others being either the property of the city council or of Registered Social Landlords.

28.4 The Chair thanked Mr Reid and Ms Kumar for their contributions.

29. PRESENTATIONS FROM CLLR ROB JARRETT, CABINET MEMBER FOR SOCIAL CARE AND CLLR LIZ WAKEFIELD, CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

29.1 Cllr Rob Jarrett, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, and Cllr Liz Wakefield, Cabinet Member for Housing, addressed the committee, explaining what they had been doing since coming into post and setting out their priorities for the city.

29.2 Cllr Jarrett told members that his priorities included: supporting carers; involving consumers as much as possible (i.e. via 'personalisation'); building community resilience (with the council as an 'enabler' rather than, necessarily, a service provider); reducing reliance on out of area placement; dealing with budget pressures; supporting the city's 3rd sector through the current financial crisis; and safeguarding.

29.3 Cllr Jarrett told the committee that he was keen to encourage individuals to be more involved in their communities. This could be facilitated by better publicising opportunities for volunteering, and by making it easier to volunteer.

29.4 In response to a question about the future of council-run day centres, Cllr Jarrett told members that there was bound to be additional pressure on day centres as the growing roll-out of self-directed care gave more individuals control over their care budgets, with significant numbers of people inevitably opting not to spend their money on attending day services. Some amalgamation of services might be required in response to falling numbers, as might a re-design of some services to make them more attractive to service users. Ultimately though, it should be recognised that some services might cease to be financially viable.

29.5 Cllr Wakefield told the committee that her priorities included: improving tenant involvement in housing services; more effective co-working with key partners such as social care, health and children's services; improving the quality of the city's housing stock; encouraging housing co-ops; reducing homelessness; improving the quality of private rented accommodation and introducing an 'ethical letting agency' for private sector rentals; and building a new, permanent site for Travellers and improving relations between Gypsy and Traveller communities and the rest of the city.

29.6 In response to a question regarding student housing, Cllr Wakefield told members that the council was keen to encourage the construction of additional dedicated student accommodation, with the intention of reducing some of the pressure on family accommodation in the city by reducing student competition for this housing. Whilst

landlords might prefer to rent housing suitable for families to students (as the returns are much higher), most would still make a profit from renting to families.

- 29.7 Cllr Wakefield also told the committee that student landlords needed to accept more responsibility for the wider social costs inherent in providing very high-density student housing (e.g. in terms of noise nuisance, litter and recycling, anti-social behaviour, parking pressures etc). The current very high level of returns for student landlords do not accurately reflect the additional costs to the city of providing student housing: a fairer balance would still allow landlords to make healthy profits, but would share the adverse costs more widely.
- 29.8 The Chair thanked Cllr Wakefield and Cllr Jarrett for their contributions.

30. HOUSING REPAIRS AND IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP

- 30.1 This item was introduced by Nick Hibberd, Head of Housing and Social Inclusion; Tom Gillham, Head of Property and Investment; and Glyn Huelin, Partnering and Performance Manager.
- 30.2 In response to a question regarding the reasons for the high level of complaints, Mr Hibberd told members that recent investment in planned repairs had significantly increased repairs activity: inevitably, the more repairs undertaken, the more complaints generated. In addition, the process of assessing properties for the Decent Homes programme may itself generate complaints: e.g. from people assessed as not being eligible for a new kitchen or bathroom. Mr Hibberd also told members that the bulk of complaints received were not about the actual quality of repair work undertaken, with many complaints focusing on aspects of customer care, an area which was currently being addressed.
- 30.3 In response to a query on independent review of repairs complaints, Mr Hibberd told members that 'mystery shopping' was used to provide an independent perspective on housing repairs. However, the bulk of complaints information is collated by (Mears) contractors immediately after finishing work. This is clearly not 100% 'objective' data, and neither the city council nor Mears assumes that it is; practically speaking, the balance is between a flawed data collection method which produces a large number of responses, and a more objective system which produces relatively few responses (such as seeking customer feedback by mail/phone some time after a repair has been carried out). Provided that the contractor-collated complaints data is viewed alongside other forms of complaints information, it can be valuable.
- 30.4 In answer to a query about delays in repairs being carried out, Mr Gillham told members that the repairs call centre and repairs teams have now been co-located in an effort to provide a more integrated service with less potential for unwarranted delays.
- 30.5 In response to questions about dealing with vulnerable tenants, Mr Huelin told the committee that work was ongoing around sharing appropriate information on vulnerability with Mears – e.g. so that contractors were aware that residents at a particular address might need some time to answer the door. Mr Hibberd added that the repairs service possibly features a very high degree of activity, with more than 40,000 repairs carried out every year. There is therefore a real opportunity to use repairs data

to help identify and support vulnerable people, whilst maintaining the appropriate level of client confidentiality.

30.6 RESOLVED – That the presentation from the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion be noted, and that Mr Hibberd be invited back to a future meeting to provide further information on user satisfaction with the repairs service, and developments in the use of repairs data to better support vulnerable clients.

31. TENANT SCRUTINY: FOR INFORMATION

31.1 This item was introduced by Nick Hibberd, Head of Housing and Social Inclusion.

31.2 RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

32. ITEMS TO GO FORWARD TO CABINET OR THE RELEVANT CABINET MEMBER MEETING

32.1 There were none.

33. ITEMS TO GO FORWARD TO COUNCIL

33.1 There were none.

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

