

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE SUB-COMMITTEE

3.00pm 4 SEPTEMBER 2012

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Wakefield (Chair); Councillor Peltzer Dunn (Opposition Spokesperson), Farrow, Jarrett, Duncan, Pidgeon, Robins and Mears

Tenant Representatives Keith Cohen (North East Area Housing Management Panel), Roy Crowhurst (West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel), Barry Kent (Tenant Disability Network), David Murtagh (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel) and John Melson (Hi Rise Action Group)

PART ONE

9. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

9A Declarations of Substitute Members

9.1 Councillor Mears declared that she was attending as a substitute for Councillor Wells. Keith Cohen declared that he was attending as a substitute for Heather Hayes.

9B Declarations of Interests

9.2 There were none.

9C Exclusion of the Press and Public

9.3 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.

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

10. MINUTES

10.1 RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee held on 29 May 2012 be agreed and signed as correct record.

11. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 11.1 The Chair was pleased to announce that the Housing & Social Inclusion service has been awarded Keep Britain Tidy "Cleaner, Greener, Safer Neighbourhood" accreditation at initiator level. This followed a robust assessment process in the Moulsecomb, Bevendean, Coldean, Bates estate and Saunders Park Pilot area and reflects all the good work that had been done with tenants around 'rate your estate', grounds maintenance, and the estate development budget. The Service Improvement Team would now be working with residents on an ongoing Action Plan to work towards the next level of Accreditation.
- 11.2 Seaside Homes recently housed its 100th tenant, a 23 year old mother and her young family. 241 properties had now been leased as planned, with another batch due on the 1st October.
- 11.3 The seven low rise blocks on the Bristol estate had been completely refurbished. Not only did they look great but their thermal efficiency had been greatly improved with roofs and windows replaced.
- 11.4 The Financial Inclusion work was progressing with the new Inclusion Team now in place. The team included an in-house money advice caseworker to help tenants and leaseholders to look at different ways they could improve their financial situation. MACS (Money Advice and Community Support), a specialist voluntary sector money advice organisation, have been awarded the Money and Debt Advice Contract and will shortly commence outreach sessions to provide specialist casework support.
- 11.5 Officers had begun to contact tenants of 'working age' who would be affected by government changes to how their housing benefit was calculated from next April. Benefits staff had written to all tenants affected by the changes and housing staff had started to visit tenants to help explore the different options that were available to them.
- 11.6 More information on all of this good progress could be found in the next edition of Homing In along with photographs and feedback from residents, which would be sent out to tenant's homes this month.
- 11.7 The chair confirmed that it had just been announced that Mark Prisk would be the new Housing Minister in the Cabinet reshuffle.

12. CALL-OVER

- 12.1 A question was raised as to whether the meeting was quorate. It was noted that whilst all the councillors were present, only 5 of the 13 tenant representatives were in attendance. The solicitor to the meeting referred to Rule 21 of the Constitution, which stated that a meeting would be quorate providing one quarter of the number of voting members were present. As this had been satisfied it was therefore confirmed that the meeting could go ahead.
- 12.2 It was agreed that all items be reserved for debate and determination.

13. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

13.1 There were no petitions, written questions or deputations.

14. ISSUES RAISED BY COUNCILLORS

14.1 There were no petitions, written questions, letters or notices of motion from councillors.

15. REPORT OF THE INNOVATION GROUP ON RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

15.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place on the work and final proposals of the Innovation Group on resident involvement. The report followed a report to the Housing Committee in April 2012 which had made the Committee aware of the draft Innovation Group report and the plans for further resident consultation on the proposals. The report updated the draft version following consultations which took place at the May 2012 City Assembly, meetings with individual residents and through Homing In magazine. The Chair thanked all those, residents and officers, who had been involved in preparing the report.

15.2 Appendix one to the report (pages 20-22 in the agenda) included a summary of the 36 main suggestions, and it was agreed that the Committee would comment on each of those suggestions.

15.3 Councillor Peltzer Dunn noted that the report clarified that the term 'Resident' referred to both tenants and leaseholders, and he asked whether those who resided in a property but weren't a tenant or a leaseholder would be excluded. The Committee was reassured that it was not the intention to exclude anyone, and some tenant representatives and adult children who were not tenants or leaseholders had been involved in the consultation. Alternative words/phrases had been considered. A number of alternative suggestions were put forward, including 'people living in council properties', 'households', and 'tenants and leaseholders and their households'.

15.4 The Committee considered Suggestion 1 (adopting a revised code of conduct). Mr Melson questioned the need for a revised code of conduct as there was already one in place. Mr Kent said that different groups had different codes of conduct and it was important that everyone used the same one. The Chair referred to page 10 of appendix one (page 23 in the agenda), and noted that 87% of the residents who commented on that issue were in favour of a change.

15.5 The Committee considered Suggestion 2 (reassessing the need for a Tenant Compact Monitoring Group (TCMG)). Councillor Mears asked why it was necessary to reassess the need for the TCMG, and asked for clarification of what would be different with Service Improvement Group. She also commented that many of the working groups she had set up should have been closed down by now, but they were still running. The Committee were advised that there had been recognition that the TCMG were not doing what was in their terms of reference and that the TCMG had acknowledged that they had found certain issues hard to deal with. Mr Kent stated that he had not attended the last few meetings of the TCMG because there were so many arguments within the group and there was concern that if they couldn't agree amongst themselves they wouldn't be able to help others. Mr Murtagh agreed and said that the TCMG had behaved appalling over the last two years.

- 15.6 The Committee considered Suggestion 3 (Tenant and Resident Associations). Councillor Farrow noted that all communities and estates were different and would need individual help. The Committee was advised that appropriate help and support would be offered to all Tenant and Resident Associations (TRA). Mr Cohen was concerned that some areas had no representatives and wondered who would be involved in the TRA. The Chair reassured the Committee that the intention was to have representatives on all TRA. Councillor Mears noted that the report stated that 62% of residents were satisfied with housing generally and that their views were listened to and acted on, and was concerned that they may therefore feel that was no need to be involved.
- 15.7 The Committee considered Suggestion 4 (CRB checks). Councillor Farrow asked for clarification on when a CRB check would be needed and how it would be operated. Councillor Mears also asked in what circumstances it would be needed and was concerned over funding as she did not think that HRA should pay for it. The Committee was advised that the suggestion had come from residents. Some of the groups had discussed the possibility of holding homework or sports clubs etc. The council would offer support where necessary. Mr Murtagh suggested that there would a number of ways to generate additional funding such as coffee mornings, and the council would not be expected to fund it all. Mr Melson asked what would happen if someone failed a CRB check and did not think it should be the responsibility of residents.
- 15.8 The Committee considered Suggestion 5 (training for TRA chairs and other positions). Mr Crowhurst asked who would provide the training and who would monitor it. The Committee was advised that the training would be monitored as it was now, with feedback from those who undertook it. The training would be provided at the Resource Centre as it was now, but it was also hoped to use other organisations such as City College, or voluntary sector groups. Councillor Farrow suggested it would be useful to provide training in the evenings or weekends as well as during the day, and also that training for Secretary's and Treasurer's be provided. Mr Kent said that some residents may have difficulty with literacy and support for them would be useful. The Committee was advised that there was a range of training which it was hoped to provide, and that the council was already discussing with trade unions and others to look at providing literacy training at the learning centre in Moulsecoomb.
- 15.9 The Committee considered Suggestion 6 (establishment of a separate body to deal with code of conduct breaches). Mr Melson said it would be important to have a balance, and not to return to the old system.
- 15.10 The Committee considered Suggestions 7-13 (Tenant and Resident Associations). Councillor Mears noted there was reference to 'compulsory' training and asked who would police the training and whether anyone had spoken to the Resource Centre. The Committee was advised that conversations had been held with the Resource Centre, and there was an appreciation that the Resource Centre would prefer that people were not compelled to undergo training. The wording could be changed to 'highly recommended' or 'core training'. It was not the case that people would be forced to undertake training, but the council wanted to encourage as many people as possible to do it. Mr Kent felt training would be very useful but it should not be compulsory. Councillor Farrow referred to suggestion 11 (keeping a list of TRA members), and said that all tenants should already be part of associations. All residents should be given equal information and not just those who were active in the association. Councillor

Farrow referred to suggestion 12 (increasing TRA meetings that were tenant only), and said that new associations would need assistance if officers would not be present. Mr Melson said that officers should be present unless requested not to. Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to suggestion 9 (annual impact assessment for TRAs), and the further information provided on page 54, and was concerned that it was far too detailed. Councillor Peltzer Dunn suggested that there be a two year rather than an annual impact assessment for the TRAs. Councillor Robins referred to suggestion 12 and thought that it could be advantageous for the TRAs not to always have an officer present. The Committee was advised that suggestion 11 had come from residents, but could be removed. With regard to suggestion 12, if an officer were requested they could attend. Resident Associations could meet whenever they wanted and resident feedback was that it would sometimes be useful not to have an officer present. As much support as possible would be provided, but it would not always be possible to have an officer available to attend all meetings. It was agreed that some organisations' examples of annual impact assessments were detailed, and some more simple mechanisms could be introduced, but it was necessary to look at the cost effectiveness and impact of resident involvement.

15.11 The Committee considered Suggestions 14-17 (Area Panels). Councillor Mears said that it appeared that Area Panels were no longer important, and asked whether the cost of running them was an issue. The Committee was reassured that Area Panels were important and their views had been taken into account. The cost of holding each round of Area Panels was around £1,800, with each round of Blue Pages costing around an additional £2,000. It was important to look at the best use of money. Councillor Mears stated that Area Panels were for tenants and were paid for out of tenant rents. Housing Management was about performance and the suggestions in this report seemed to be silencing tenants. The Chair confirmed that that was not the case. The Head of Housing & Social Inclusion reminded the Committee that this report had come from tenant's suggestions. The whole motivation for the report was to give tenants a voice and support their involvement. Mr Melson stated that the only voice tenants had was when they had Blue Pages and that Area Panels were useful. Mr Melson asked for a breakdown of the cost of preparing this report. In response to this, additional information was circulated comparing the costs of running the Innovation Group with those for running the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group (TCMG). The Committee was informed that costs considered were eg room hire, refreshments and travel; and totalled £339 for the Innovation group and £1,534 for TCMG. Also that when the figures were averaged out per meeting, the former was £24 and the latter was £220. Mr Melson commented that he did not mean the cost of holding the innovation group meetings but the cost of preparing the actual report. It was confirmed that there would be no budget pressure from preparing this report as it was the core work of the department to bring reports to meetings.

15.12 Suggestion 18 related to Tenant Scrutiny Panel and would be covered in more detail in Item 16 on the agenda.

15.13 The Committee considered Suggestions 19-26 (resident involvement framework and working groups and the involvement of young people)). Councillor Peltzer Dunn noted the reference to 'young people' and asked if that meant those under 18. It was confirmed that it referred to young tenants aged 18-30. Councillors Farrow and Peltzer Dunn both referred to suggestion 26 and suggested that the percentage earmarked should be confirmed. Mr Crowhurst said that the Estate Development Budget (EDB) was a finite

budget for the whole city and there could be other ways to raise money. The Committee was advised that this suggestion had come from residents who wanted to include everyone. It was important to hear from younger people about, for example, what they wanted on their estate. Councillor Duncan said that this report had been looked at a number of times and it wasn't for councillors to pick apart what tenants had asked for. Residents had been asked what they wanted the money spent on and they had said that they wanted to help the whole community to be engaged. Councillor Mears replied that a lot of these issues had not been looked at before. This was Housing Management and it was important to ensure that funds were not used by other council departments.

- 15.14 The Committee considered Suggestions 27-31 (the menu of involvement, communications and social media and the funding of resident involvement). Councillor Farrow referred to suggestion 29 and said that there were different size associations and it might be better to allocate money to an area. The Committee was advised that it was a suggestion that each application be capped at £1,000. All associations could complete an application. There would be a cut off date for submission of applications, and it would not be on a first come first served basis. Resident Involvement Officers would support associations. Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked what the budget would be, and was advised it is £26,250. Councillor Peltzer Dunn thought the wording suggested that there would be a limit to one application per TRA and might be confusing. Councillor Robins thought it was clear that there would be no limit to the number of applications any association could submit, but that any application would be limited to £1,000. Councillor Mears referred to Appendix 3 (page 67 on agenda), and said that a restructure would be costly and would be a misuse of tenants rent. If the Strategic Director was looking at a restructure, why was tenants' rents being used. The Committee was advised that Appendix 3 was not a restructure of staff, but a new way of resident involvement and there would no additional cost involved. Councillor Mears said she would like to see a breakdown of the current budget and the costings alongside the new structure in Appendix 3. The Chair confirmed that it was important to know how effective and useful resident involvement is, and to ensure value for money was being achieved.
- 15.15 The Committee considered Suggestions 32-36 (resident training and annual impact assessments). Councillor Farrow referred to suggestion 33 and said that it would be good to hold workshops and particularly useful if all the TRAs attended together. Mr Crowhurst referred to suggestion 36 and asked how the assessments would be done and what the cost implications would be. Councillor Jarrett said that financial issues should be for the Housing Committee and not for this meeting.
- 15.16 Councillor Peltzer Dunn noted an inconsistency with information relating to a meeting of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel on pages 72 and 105 of the report. On page 72 it says a meeting would be quorate with 6 people and on page 105 it would be 7 people. Councillor Peltzer Dunn also noted that page 72 stated that 'inquorate meetings should be noted and decisions ratified at the next quorate meeting'. It was agreed that it should read '*any discussion at an inquorate meeting should be noted and considered at the next quorate meeting*'.
- 15.17 The Committee had been asked to endorse this report, and it would then be considered by the Housing Committee. However, following the comments made at this meeting it was agreed that an action plan be produced covering the issues raised, and that the report

together with the aforementioned action plan would come to the next meeting of the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee.

- 15.18 **RESOLVED** – That the report of the Innovation Group on Resident Involvement, together with an action plan following comments made at this meeting, be considered at the meeting of the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee on 23 October 2012.

16. TENANT SCRUTINY

- 16.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place, on the creation of a Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP). The report set out the model for the introduction of a TSP in Brighton and Hove.

- 16.2 Councillor Mears noted that recommendations of the TSP would be presented to the Housing Committee, and asked if it could also be presented to Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee (HMCSC) for information. Councillor Mears was concerned that the creation of a TSP would devalue the role of the HMCSC, and asked if the long term plan was to get rid of the Committee altogether. The Chair assured the Committee that there was no intention to remove the HMCSC. Officers referred Councillor Mears to paragraph 5.6 of the report which stated that all recommendations of the TSP would be presented to the Housing Committee and then the responses of that Committee would then be reported to the HMCSC. Officers explained that TSP would make recommendations directly to the Council's Housing Committee rather than formally via HMCSC. This was because HMCSC and Housing Committee had an overlapping membership, and it was a fundamental principle of scrutiny that the body responding to scrutiny recommendations should be discrete from the body making those recommendations (i.e. that members should not sit on both bodies). However, this formal reporting pathway aside, it was intended that the TSP and HMCSC should be close and mutually supportive partners.

- 16.3 Mr Crowhurst asked if the TSP would be able to make any decisions themselves. Officers confirmed that the TSP could only make recommendations.

- 16.4 Mr Kent was concerned over the role of the HMCSC, previously it had been a full Committee and now it was a 'sub' Committee with no powers and asked why it had been changed. Mr Kent was advised that the council had agreed to move from a Cabinet system to a Committee system, and so this Committee was now part of the Housing Committee. The change had been agreed by Full Council.

- 16.5 Mr Melson was concerned that if tenants were conducting the scrutiny there was a possibility that it could become adversarial. Officers reassured Mr Melson that a panel would need to be very clear about why it was being held, and confirmed that scrutiny officers would offer support to the TSP.

- 16.6 Councillor Robins thanked officers for the report and thought the introduction of a TSP was a positive thing, and encouraged everyone to support it. Councillor Robins asked if the Chair of the Panel would be independent. Officers said that the plan was to have an independent mentor who would be able to support the panel.

16.7 Councillor Peltzer Dunn agreed with the comments of Councillor Robins. Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to the report and suggested the wording of paragraphs 5.3 and 5.6 be looked at, as they appeared to contradict each other. Councillor Peltzer Dunn noted that paragraph 1.2 stated that the report had 'been' presented to HMCSC on 4 September. The report on the Innovation Group, which recommended the creation of the TSP, had not yet been endorsed by the HMCSC and so the wording of that paragraph was misleading.

16.8 Mr Crowhurst asked if a TSP requested information, officers would be compelled to provide it. It was confirmed they would, subject to the usual scrutiny 'access to information' regulations.

16.9 **RESOLVED**

(1) That the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee noted the report.

(2) That the comments of the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee be taken into consideration.

17. **HOUSING & SOCIAL INCLUSION PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 4 2011/12**

17.1 The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing & Social Inclusion.

17.2 Councillor Farrow referred to Appendix One of the report and noted with concern that there were two properties that had remained empty for a long period of time; one for 1488 days and one for 4022 days. Officers advised that those properties needed extensive work, and there had previously been insufficient resources available to do that. There were now plans in place for all empty properties.

17.3 Councillor Mears asked how many solar panels had been installed on council properties. Officers did not have that information available at the meeting, but were able to confirm that solar panels had been fitted to 7 blocks on the Bristol Estate and to 20 properties at the end of last year. The government had changed the tariff for solar panels earlier this year, and it had therefore been necessary to review the installation of them. Councillor Mears said that the current administration had delayed the installation of panels prior to the government's announcement and had therefore missed the boat on feed in tariffs. Councillor Jarrett said that the government's plans had not been known prior to their announcement, and this administration and the previous one had both therefore 'missed the boat'. The current administration had been looking very carefully at energy efficiency, and in particular thermal efficiency.

17.4 Councillor Mears noted the percentage of secure council tenants being served a Notice of Seeking Possession for rent arrears had increased, and accepted this was most likely due to the economic situation. Councillor Mears asked if information on what was being done to reduce this number, and arrears generally, could be addressed at a future meeting.

17.5 With regard to paragraph 3.9.1 and the content and presentation of future performance reports, Councillor Mears suggested indicators that show other local authorities' quartiles; information on what is being done to reduce management costs; area breakdown data for rent arrears performance as had been provided in previous reports; and for the end of year report to give performance from the previous year end for comparison purposes. The Chair agreed that that would be useful.

- 17.6 Councillor Peltzer Dunn commented upon the performance indicators in paragraph 3.5 regarding repairs completed on time, and asked how this figure related to the cancelled repairs jobs referred to in paragraph 3.5.1. He said he was happy for a written response. Officers agreed to provide that information. The Chair asked if that information could be provided for all the HMCSC members.
- 17.7 Mr Kent referred back to solar panels and questioned why some of those that had been installed had been fitted to west facing properties and not just south facing ones, which he understood was the appropriate direction. Councillor Jarrett said the west facing properties would get sunlight from 11 am and so were acceptable.
- 17.8 Councillor Farrow asked if officers could look into installing solar panels for the provision of hot water. Officers confirmed that a Solar Thermal had already been installed in one location, and would be happy to provide further information on the matter.
- 17.9 Councillor Farrow suggested it would be useful if future reports could give more information on those properties which had been empty for a long period of time.
- 17.10 **RESOLVED** That the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committees comments and feedback on the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 8.00pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this day of

