

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Area Panel Boundaries and the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>1 May 2014</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Monitoring Officer and Executive Director, Environment, Development &amp; Housing</b>
<b>Contact Officer: Name:</b>	<b>Abraham Ghebre-Ghiorghis Tel: 291500</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 This report proposes changes to the council's resident involvement structure by realigning the geographical boundaries of Area Panels to match ward boundaries. It also proposes that the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee (HMCSC) be discontinued, but revised arrangements and ways of working be introduced to ensure more effective tenant consultation and input into the decision-making process.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That the Policy & Resources Committee:-

- 2.1 Approves the redrawing of the 4 Area Panel area boundaries, as shown in Appendix 1, to align with ward boundaries
- 2.2 Approves the abolition of the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee

**3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**Area Panel boundaries**

- 3.1 There are currently 4 Area Panels – North & East, West Hove & Portslade, East and Central, which meet 4 times a year to consider reports relating to the council's role as landlord and to make recommendations to the HMCSC. Membership is made up of all ward councillors within the boundaries of the Panel and tenant/resident representatives. 8 of the council's 21 wards straddle Area Panel areas and one of those 8 straddles 3 Area Panel areas. The current Area Panel areas relate to old housing office areas.
- 3.2 Aligning housing area panel areas with ward boundaries would have a number of advantages. It would allow for closer identification with ward councillors, and allow them to focus their attention on only one area. It would also avoid "straddling." The map at Appendix 1 shows the current Area Panel boundaries shaded by different colours, with the proposed four areas to match ward

boundaries denoted by the bold black lines. The change will also bring a new mix of tenant representatives together to share experiences and or learn from each other.

- 3.3 A reduction in the number of Panels to three was considered, but was not supported by Panel members. When they were consulted on changing the areas to match ward boundaries, two of the area panels favoured alignment with ward Boundaries (78% and 68%) and two favoured retaining the status quo (57% and 71%)

#### **Area Panels Ways of Working**

- 3.4 Currently all Panels are chaired by a member of the Administration. Attendance at some Panel meetings has been in decline. On several occasions, there were more officers than tenants in attendance.
- 3.5 Realigning the Panels is an opportunity to reinvigorate and strengthen them. It is proposed that a tenant representative should be elected to be Deputy Chairperson of an Area Panel, working with and substituting for the councillor Chair. Panels were consulted on this, together with a suggestion that instead of a member of the administration automatically being Chair, a councillor for area should be elected Chair by all ward councillors for the area. All Panels were in favour of having a tenant/resident as Deputy Chair and three were in favour of a councillor being elected by fellow councillors. (100 % 100 % and 56%).
- 3.6 In order to strengthen the ability of tenants to influence decisions and to have their views taken into account, it is proposed that all reports being submitted to the Housing Committee relating to the functions of the Council as a housing landlord should first be consulted upon at Area Panels. The Panels' views would then be included within the Community Engagement & Consultation section of reports. This would allow all Members to be apprised of the panels' views.

#### **Future of the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee (HMCSC)**

- 3.7 The HMCSC comprises 8 elected Members and up to 12 non-voting co-optees. It has no decision-making powers. Instead it makes recommendations to the Housing Committee. As the only Sub-Committee within the council (other than standards and personnel appeal panels which technically have sub-committee status) it is unusual in the Council's constitution.
- 3.8 There is significant overlap and duplication between HMCSC and the Area Panels. Both provide a forum for tenant consultation, and for tenant representatives and councillors to jointly debate matters. Area Panels provide the main mechanism for tenant consultation and is where residents are at the heart of discussions. At HMCSC, tenants rarely speak before councillors, and the seating layout (councillors in the front row, and tenant representatives behind them) add to the feeling that the tenant representatives' place is secondary.
- 3.9 Housing Services, and the council generally need to make efficiencies in time

and costs in order to meet increasing demands on services. HMCSC meetings require significant staff and financial resources which could be more effectively used to meet these needs. It has been calculated that the average cost of each HMCSC meeting is £3,200 per meeting, and there are usually 5 meetings each year.

- 3.10 Currently, tenants attending association meetings and Area Panels report that they have very little feedback about what happens at HMCSC. This raises doubts about the relevance of the Sub-Committee.
- 3.11 HMCSC does not make decisions and its role is purely advisory. When the Council had an executive system with only one Executive Councillor making decisions, it made sense to have a Consultative Sub-Committee to advise and inform the decision of the Cabinet member. In the current cross-party committee system, the Sub-Committee stands out as an unnecessary and dated way to achieve limited consultation with a limited number of tenants – particularly when other methods are available. It is therefore proposed that the HMCSC be abolished.
- 3.12 At the East Area Panel, residents who commented about the proposed abolition, mainly spoke in favour. There was some ambivalence at the North & East Panel, although some residents did comment that they would be unhappy to see the Sub-Committee abolished. At both the West and Central Area Panel meetings, a vote was taken and residents were opposed to the proposals. An indicative vote of tenant representatives at HMCSC on 1 April was also unanimously opposed to the proposal.
- 3.13 If the proposal to abolish the Sub-Committee is agreed, tenants will still be able to make their views known through the normal democratic processes – deputations, letters etc. Further, Area Panel views will be included in all reports – see paragraph 3.5 above.

#### **4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1 Consideration was also given to reducing the number of Area Panels to 3, which would have brought about savings. However, there were concerns that Panel Areas would be too large; tenants would not attend meetings that were not local, travel distances would be too far, and there would be insufficient time to hear from everyone. This proposal was not acceptable to tenants.

#### **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 There has been consultation with all four Area Panels on the proposals to strengthen them and change their geographical boundaries. The results of that consultation have been incorporated in the body of the report. Further, the Panels and HMCSC were afforded the opportunity to make comments about the proposal to abolish the Sub-Committee. Those comments are also included in the body of the report.

## 6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The proposals in the report will lead to a streamlining of the council's tenant consultation procedures. .

## 7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The costs of HMCSC meetings in Hove Town Hall mentioned in paragraph 3.2 above, mainly relate to staff time so the actual direct revenue savings to the Housing Revenue Account will be negligible. However, it is likely that staff time will be saved in Housing, financial services, legal services and democratic services.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks*

*Date: 22/04/14*

### Legal Implications:

- 7.2 According to Article 13 of the Council's constitution, Policy & Recourses Committee has powers to approve the establishment, abolition or changes to any Sub-Committee. The committee therefore has sufficient powers to make the decisions recommended at paragraphs

*Lawyer Consulted: Liz Woodley*

*Date: 10/04/14*

### Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 There are no significant Equality and Diversity issues.

### Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 There are no significant Sustainability Implications.

### Any Other Significant Implications:

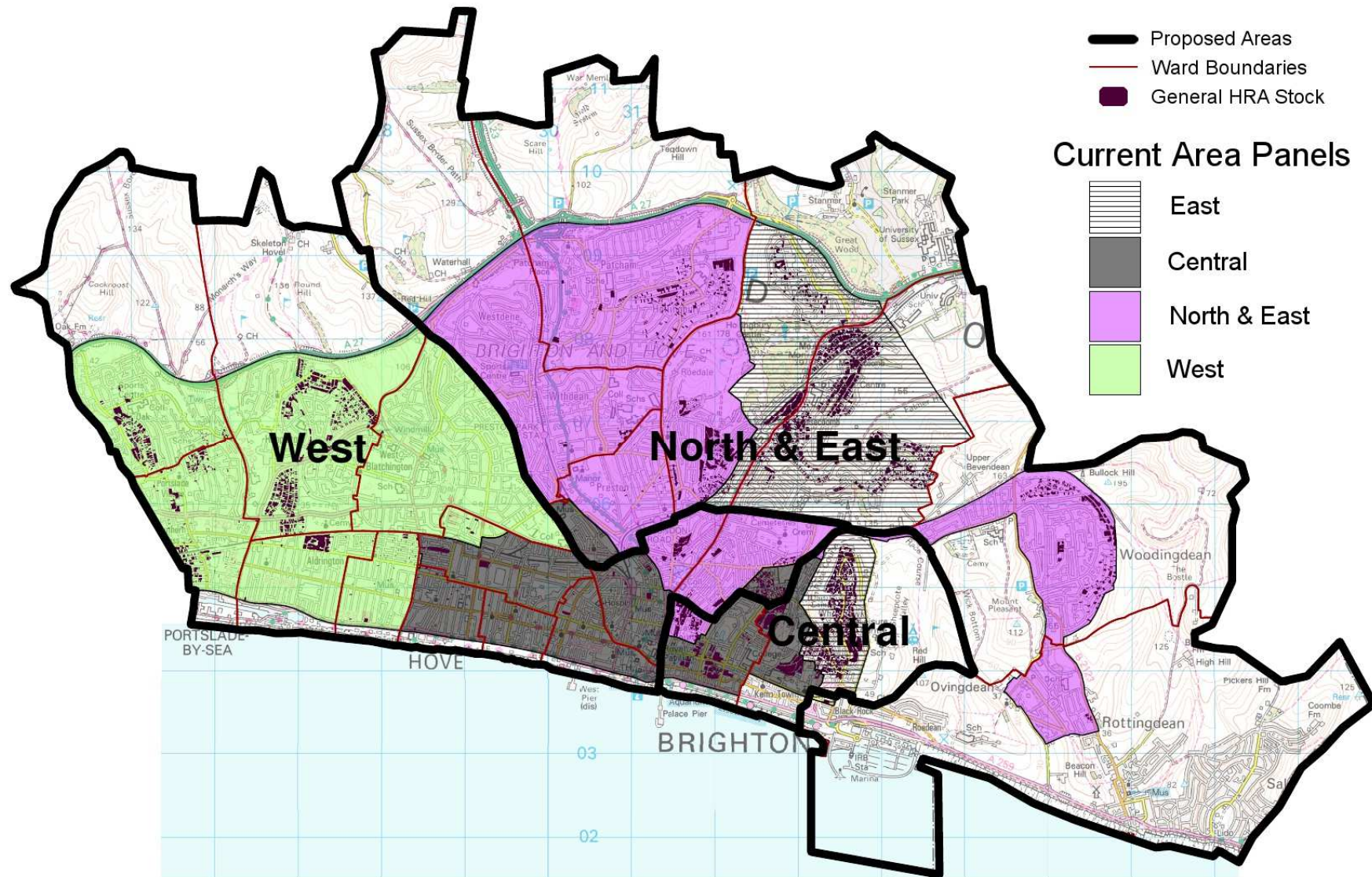
- 7.5 None.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1. Map of Housing Area Panel Boundaries (Based on three panels)
2. Map of Housing Area Panel Boundaries (Based on three panels)

# Current and proposed (3) Area Panel boundaries to match housing areas



### Current and proposed (4) Area Panel boundaries

