

Items from East Tenants Only Meeting held on Tuesday, 10 May 2016

1. Leaseholder repairs

A leaseholder in Craven Vale, living on the 2nd floor, had problems with leaks into her flat for an extended period of time caused by a leak to the roof. It took a long time for Mears to identify and repair the problem, during which time the repair was reported several times.

As a result of the leak there is damage to the decoration in the leaseholder's flat. She has been told that she is responsible for this. This was queried by the meeting as the damage was caused by an external fault for which the council is responsible.

A different example was given of an ongoing leak to the roof of Robert Lodge which caused damage to the decoration in a tenanted flat. On that occasion the tenant was given paint to redecorate.

Action: *It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel.*

Clarification will be requested on who is responsible for making good internal decoration that has been damaged due to an ongoing external leak. This information is requested for both leaseholders and tenants.

**Response from Theresa Youngman, Programme Manager, Property & Investment Team,
Tel: 01273 293190**

All redecoration following water leaks is the tenants (or leaseholders) responsibility. Any damage caused by a leak should be claimed on the tenants' (leaseholders) household contents insurance. However, where there have been specific situations regarding significant delays in repairs reported to Mears or the council, these will be individually be assessed and investigated.

A decision will then be made on whether the council (or Mears) has been negligent in the repairing of the leak. If it is found that there has been negligence then an offer of redecoration may be made by way of compensation to the tenant (or leaseholder). If any tenant or leaseholder believes that Mears or the council has been negligent in their repair duties and they can apply to claim for damage through the council's Insurance Team.

Contact details are 01273 292929 or email insurance.section@brighton-hove.gov.uk

2. Repairs to double glazing

A leaseholder in North Whitehawk flats had a problem with condensation between the two panes of her double glazed window. It was inspected by a sub-contractor who said it would be repaired within 6 weeks. This didn't happen so the leaseholder chased it up, and was told that Mears had decided the job would not be done. Around the same time a tenant in the block had a similar problem and her window was repaired.

Another example was given of a similar problem that a leaseholder had in Craven Vale and their window was also repaired.

Action: *It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel as there seems to be some inconsistency. Clarification is requested on the policy for repairing windows in leasehold and tenanted flats.*

Response from Marcus Richardson Housing Programme Surveyor, Property & Investment, Tel: 01273 293070

There is no specific policy relating to window repairs or replacements within the council. However, all windows that Brighton & Hove City Council are responsible for will be maintained through the Repairs and Maintenance contract in conjunction with our partners Mears. Specifically, the decision to propose any window replacement rests with the council as the freeholder. Brighton leaseholders are required to contribute towards the cost of replacing of all windows in the block.

Where windows are deemed to be still 'repairable' and 'serviceable' they will be maintained, if a specific window is deemed beyond economical repair we will look to renew it. Where we know areas of the city that are having windows that are coming to the end of their useful/cost effective life we will fit these into a planned programme. It may have been the case that these examples fit into the planned replacement scheme and therefore would need to wait until all windows were due to be replaced. Without specific details it is difficult to comment on this specific case, but we can look at this if the leaseholder supplies us with the relevant information via the tenant representative repairs enquiry process.

4. Information to leaseholders

A leaseholder from north Whitehawk was advised, during the purchase process, that no major works were planned for 10 – 12 years. Since they bought the flat several major works have been planned, which means they are liable for £40,000 of the costs. They have sought legal advice about this.

Action: *No further action required.*

5. Estate Development Budget

There are concerns about how long it takes for EDB work to be done. Patrick reported that 6 fences on Manor Farm that were agreed by EDB in 2014, were finally put up 3 weeks ago.

There was also a discussion about the costing of EDB work as people felt this is often far higher than it should be.

Action: It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel with a request that the following proposal be considered:

a. Once EDB bids have been agreed they should go to Mears for a full breakdown of costs to be drawn up.

b. The full costings should then be passed to the Residents' Association to be checked, and the work should not commence until the detailed costings have been agreed,

Response from Becky Purnell, Resident Involvement Manager, Tel: 01273 293022

The deadline for the EDB bidding forms is mid-November. If agreed at the Area Panel EDB meetings in April the work is delivered over the course of the financial year. The council recognises it is a long process; however it is a large programme of work. The process has improved as only bids that are possible are agreed and the work is priced up by Mears before the voting meetings.

Response from Keith Dadswell, Responsive & EDB Project Manager, Tel: 01273 574382

Upon submitting a main bid a series of checks are undertaken prior to Mears involvement these include Property & Investment's programmed and capital works checks. Mears receive the approved bids and using the information provided, site visits and meetings with tenants associations (TAs) compile a costing to undertake proposed works. The level of information provided by the TAs to support main bids is improving year on year and Mears encourages TAs to be involved in the specifications, designs of any potential main bids.

The majority of EDB work carried out is in accordance with contract schedule of rates, any specialist works will be specified and sent to Mears' subcontractors for quotation as per contract requirements. The costs are then presented at the EDB Area Panels. It would be possible for the TAs to be aware of the applied costs prior to Area Panel however Mears would require the bids to be received sooner to allow for any changes or to obtain alternative costs if the TA is in disagreement.

6. Vandalism and graffiti in north Whitehawk

The leaseholder from Heron Court reported continuous problems with anti-social behavior, vandalism and graffiti. When this is reported the council do not seem to be interested in doing anything about it.

When repairs are done, due to vandalism and graffiti, leaseholders are asked to pay a proportion of the costs.

Action: It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel with a request for clarification on the following:

- a. Why is no action being taken to deal with the vandalism and graffiti around north Whitehawk flats?*
- b. Why are leaseholders being charged for this work when the council should be claiming it on their insurance?*

Response from Caroline Boaks, Neighbourhood Team Leader, Tel: 01273 293207

a. Thank you for raising this matter to our attention. The first graffiti or anti-social behaviour that the Neighbourhoods Team have been alerted to was on 1 June 2016 from the council's Estates Team. The Estates Team removed most of it but some they have struggled to get off. The cleaners are trying to find out who 'Callum', the name on the graffiti is, for us to be able to do anymore. The graffiti was on the stairwell which is not covered by CCTV.

The remaining graffiti will be painted over or otherwise removed and at time of writing we do not have the answer as to when but it will be done.

The local Neighbourhood Officer Toya Regan will pay particular attention to these areas over the coming weeks. We do want to work in partnership with our residents so if there are any further instances please call 01273 293030 or email Housing.CustomerServices@brighton-hove.gov.uk so that we can respond quickly.

Response from David Arthur, Leasehold Services Manager, Tel: 01273 293072

There are no costs passed on to leaseholders through the service charge for these items. Malicious damage is covered under the leaseholders' buildings insurance policy, and graffiti removal is no currently included in service charge costs.

7. Parking

There are continuing problems with parking on the grass verges in Manor Farm. Patrick felt that some bollards, similar to those in Craven Vale, would help to resolve this problem.

Action: *Patrick to contact local councillors to discuss this.*

8. Cleaning at Robert Lodge

Chris reported that there has been a big improvement in the cleaning at Robert Lodge, which is probably due to the hard work of the person who now does this job.

She asked that this be passed onto Dave Whittington and his team.

Action: *Judy to ask the Resident Involvement Officer to pass on this comment.*

Response from Resident Involvement Team, Tel: 01273 294651

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We have passed on the feedback to Dave and his team and they are delighted thank you.

Three star items from the Central Tenant Only meeting held on 19/05/16

1. **Roof repair at Highden, Westmount and Crownhill**

A repair to roof doors at HWC took 2 years to complete, and there were a number of problems about the way these repairs were handled.

Action: *Ill for all Blue Pages and discussion at Area Panel.*

Response from Delia Hills, Mears Ltd Complaints & Resident Liaison Team, Tel: 01273 574354

Please accept our apologies for our failure to stop water ingress through the roof doors in 2014. Our records show in April 2014 our sub-contractor attended to fit a new door and frame leading to the roof from the tank room. However, two years later in January 2016 our operative attended to a report of a fault and he reported that rain was again coming through the double door on the roof and repairs were completed on the 17th February 2016. Please be advised that the sub-contractor who attended in 2014 is no longer employed by Mears.

Mears have recently mobilised a direct roofing labour force and a roofing supervisor, this has resulted in greater control over available resources and a quicker turnaround on roofing repairs. In addition Mears have invested in alternative working at height access equipment enabling early diagnosis and an increase in first time fixes on roofing works whilst eliminating the need for many scaffolds.

An increase in direct trade operatives has enabled Mears to reduce their reliance on sub-contractors. Remaining subcontractors work streams are closely monitored and all contractors partake in a monthly review meeting where all operational key elements are discussed (performance, Health and Safety, quality etc).

2. Communication with leaseholders

Communication between the Council and leaseholders about major work, which will incur expense for leaseholders, is poor and needs improving.

Action: *Ill for all Blue Pages and discussion at Area Panel.*

Response from Perrin Horne, Customer Services Manager Property & Investment Tel: 01273 294641

For residents who have bought leases on our council homes there is a responsibility to contribute to any improvements and repairs, carried out by the council, subject to the terms of their lease. The council believes the works carried out to council homes are necessary to maintain and improve the stock. We are acting on our professional structural, surveying and legal advice in complying with our obligations as a landlord to provide accommodation that meets specific decency standards and the terms of our leases in keeping the buildings in repair.

Consultation with leaseholders is a statutory requirement and we are obliged to adhere to the tight deadlines and requirements made in law in consultation with leaseholders. The Property & Investment Team can confirm that we have always maintained a high standard of consultation with leaseholders and continue to make improvements to how we communicate.

During the consultation we now offer one to one appointments with individual leaseholders to discuss the works, the costs associated and where requested, to discuss payment options. We also hold and arrange regular meetings while works are progressing to discuss any issues arising from the work. Alongside this, leaseholders and tenants receive monthly updates via newsletters.

Finally, we have put in place a range of flexible payment options for resident leaseholders who have difficulty in paying for high cost works.

3. Resident Inspectors

The Resident Inspectors have asked for permission to inspect major repair work on all properties. At the moment they are only allowed to inspect empty properties.

Action: *Ill for all Blue Pages and discussion at Area Panel.*

Response from Glyn Huelin, Partnering Business Manager Property & Investment, Tel: 01273 293306

The council has been working with the Home Service Improvement Group who led the resident inspectors' project over recent years to develop their role and opportunities for residents to provide feedback on the work of Mears and the Property & Investment Team.

The resident inspectors have recently been visiting tenants and resident associations across the city to discuss their role, get feedback on the Mears service and ask for further ideas for the Resident Inspectors to look into. The group are also working on looking at major work to senior housing conversions (studio to one bed flats) and will be carrying out a site visit in the coming weeks.

In past years the Resident Inspectors (previously called Resident Assessors) had focussed on empty property inspections. Since the revitalisation of the project, new terms of reference and name change, it has been open for discussion what areas of the Partnership could be inspected. There are suggestions being made as to what else the group might do and this is being prioritised by the Resident Inspectors to make the best use of the resident's and officer's time.

If residents are interested in getting involved in the resident inspectors programme they are welcome to attend the meetings and can contact Hannah Barker, Resident Involvement Officer 01273 296639. The dates of the Resident Inspector meetings are also online in the Resident Involvement calendar, <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/housing/council-housing/resident-involvement-meeting-diary>

2. Scaffolding

There was concern that scaffolding is still being left up for long periods of time. This issue has been raised before, and assurances given that scaffolding would be taken down immediately work is finished, but this is not happening (there have been recent cases in both Downland Court and Knoll).

Some specific issues were raised:

- a) Who is paying? Are contractors charging the Council for the unnecessary time that scaffolding is up after a job is completed?*
- b) When scaffolding is up the house contents insurance of affected properties is often invalid. You are only informed that you need to check this if you are in the flat where work is taking place. This means flats affected by scaffolding (eg a ground floor flat when work is happening on the flat above) may not realise they have no insurance.*
- c) If work undertaken by the Council invalidates an individual's insurance, who is responsible for any losses they might incur as a result?*
- d) If you have house contents insurance with the Council, is your insurance still invalid while scaffolding is up?*

Action: *Ill for all Blue Pages and discussion at Area Panel.*

Response from Keith Dadswell, Mears Responsive & EDB Project Manager, Tel: 01273 574382

Mears have been working very hard in Partnership with the council to tackle issues with scaffolding raised by residents.

I have attended the Home Group and discussed the new process which monitors and tracks all scaffold and the length of time it is in place.

a) The council are charged in accordance with contract rates and set framework agreements with contractors for the supply and erection of scaffold. This is a one off charge to the council and does not change or alter due to the length of time it is in place.

b) Mears are committed to inform all residents before scaffold is erected. The only exception is in an emergency situation. Included in the notices is the following advice on contents insurance..... "Please inform your contents insurance provider that scaffolding is now being erected around the block. Claims may prove invalid if this declaration is not made".

With Major Works and Planned Works all affected residents receive this communication, however, with responsive repair works as you correctly state some residents that need to inform their contents insurers do not currently receive this information. Therefore, the Responsive Repairs Manager Keith Dadswell will change the current communications process so that all relevant parties are informed.

c) Under the terms of the tenancy agreement, a tenant is responsible for their household insurance. It is therefore the tenants responsibility to contact (whoever their insurers are) to let them know that scaffold is in place. It may not be valid whilst scaffold is in place if you do not inform them.

d) Contents insurance will not be invalidated unless you do not let the insurers know there is scaffold in place.

3. Scaffolding and disabled access

A lack of consultation when scaffolding was erected in Clarendon & Ellen has caused problems with access for people with disabilities. This is not acceptable, and in future there must be proper consultation before any major works are done to ensure that the requirements of people with disabilities are covered.

Action: *Ill for all Blue Pages and discussion at Area Panel.*

Response from Allen Shaw, Mears Project Manager, Tel: 01273 321376

We apologise if residents feel they have not been properly consulted on the erection of scaffolding. We do endeavour to consult with residents on all aspects of the project through our pre-commencement meeting. Beyond that, we communicate through regular newsletters and coffee mornings, however we recognise that these were interrupted for a time whilst further leasehold consultation was undertaken. We apologise if the cessation of the newsletters and coffee mornings has contributed to this issue in anyway.

On the 21st June, Paul Harrison (site manager) and Rob Daley (project co-ordinator) walked the site, however they could not find any areas where scaffolding is causing an obstruction for wheelchairs or persons with limited mobility. So, please can contact the team (contact details given below) and let the team know the access issues you are experiencing and they will try to resolve for you as soon as possible.

- Site Office - 01273 321376 (Message facility available)
- Sandra Cooke - 07872-672041 (Resident Liaison Officer).

4. Damp

When properties have severe damp problems a few bricks are taken out of the wall as part of the repairs process. Properties in Knoll have been left like this for up to 14 months, causing problems for the residents as rain and drafts come into the house. If residents don't constantly chase up the repair, it just gets left.

It was asked why these repairs are not being dealt with more swiftly and if there was a quicker and less disruptive way of resolving the problem.

Action: *Ill for all Blue Pages and discussion at Area Panel.*

Response from Mears Danny Reddin, Mears Project Manager, Tel: 01273 574354

We are very sorry to hear that bricks have removed and are yet to be replaced in the Knoll area of the city. Danny Reddin, Mears Project Manager, has confirmed that following the unprecedented rainfall levels in the winter of 2013/14, we removed bricks from properties in the Knoll area in order to inspect the condition of the cavity wall insulation. Danny was unaware that some bricks have yet to be replaced and has therefore requested the addresses of these properties so that he can personally arrange for this to be rectified immediately. Please call the Mears Damp Team on 0800-052-6140 with the addresses affected.

5. Estate inspections

A number of points were raised about Estate Inspections:

- *It is different in different areas, but some Associations are not kept informed of when estate inspections are happening and are not given the opportunity to get involved.*
- *After an estate inspection, Resident Association representatives are given a report on what needs doing and what action is going to be taken. However, there is then no follow-up or communication with the Association to say when jobs have been done, or to inform them of any problems. Communication needs to improve – it is very frustrating for residents if they have put effort into resolving a problem and then nothing seems to happen.*
- *Following an estate inspection in Knoll, letters were sent to residents whose gardens are full of rubbish and really neglected. This has not led to any improvement to the gardens. What happens next? Will the Council continue to pursue this?*

Action: Ill for all Blue Pages and discussion at Area Panel.

Response from Robert Keelan, Neighbourhood Housing Manager, Tel: 01273 293261

a) Estate Inspections dates are set in a two year period and have recently been set for the timescale of April 2016 to 2018. Estate inspection booklets are set out in wards and are all available in the council's internet pages by typing "estate inspections" into the search box which takes you to the page below.

<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/housing/council-housing/estate-inspections>

Please note a few ward booklets are showing inspection dates to the end of 2017 and this is being updated at time of writing to take us up to April 2018. I appreciate that not everyone has access to the internet so if you would like the estate inspection booklet for your area printed and sent to you then please call 01273 293030 and the Customer Service Team will send one out to you.

b) Estate inspections happen six monthly so I strongly encourage tenants not to wait for an inspection to report an issue. Whereas estate inspections look for items that are broken or in need of repair, they are also for Neighbourhood Officers to spend time on estate and ideally talking with tenants and councillors about issues that need attention or improvement on the estate.

The point is heard about communication so my initial proposal is rather than one estate inspection being displayed, that we display the last two so that at least we can see progress between estate inspections.

The remit of the Neighbourhood Officer is a very large one and estate inspections are a relatively small part of their role. Each Neighbourhood Officer manages approximately 1000 properties so it is difficult to tailor communication to what each group or residents want. I would encourage any Residents' Associations to invite their Neighbourhood Officer and Team Leader to a residents meeting and this can then be established locally.

We have also brought in an “I’ve been reported sticker” to attach to broken items which is removed when the repair is carried out. This should remove any confusion as to whether an item has been reported or not.

C) The state of gardens is a real concern for us and it’s a condition of the tenancy agreement that tenants sign, to keep their gardens in good repair. There is always a story behind a messy garden and some people have good reasons for not being able to manage their gardens and others less so.

The council is refreshing its recharge policy so that we can more readily recharge tenants if we have to go in and clear it. We do have a gardening scheme for some vulnerable residents but this is very limited and consistently over-subscribed.

We have run projects in other areas of the city where Neighbourhood Officers have run gardening campaigns and found time to do lots of door knocking and been hands-on in helping tenants clear areas. We would like to repeat these as resources allow.

It should be noted that many gardens in what looks like council properties are often privately owned properties that it is difficult for the Neighbourhood Officer to deal with.

6a) Role of EDB panel

The EDB panel's original remit was to agree Quick Bids. There was concern that this panel is now making policy about how the EDB overall is run, without decisions going through the Area Panels.

Why has this decision making power been taken away from Area Panels? What is the formal role of the EDB panel, and who agrees this?

6b) £750 limit on Quick bids

It was noted that 'rolling' bids are not allowed for EDB Quick Bids. Clarendon & Ellen requested posts to stop cars parking, which came to more than £750. They wanted to apply for two lots of Quick Bids, but were told to go to the main EDB budget for this instead. This would mean a long delay, as main bids are only put in once a year.

It was noted that more money going to one Association would mean less going to others, and that Quick Bids are specifically designed to be for smaller jobs. However, it was felt that there could be more flexibility about this and it should be open to discussion.

6c) Officers' role in making EDB bids

There was agreement that EDB bids should come from Residents Associations, not individuals or Housing Officers. There is a collective process undertaken by the Resident Associations, involving local consultation, discussion and agreement about what bids to make. This is undermined if the process can be side-stepped and the money available for Residents Associations bids reduced.

6d) What can the EDB be spent on?

The original idea was that EDB money was for improvements, but increasingly it is spent on work that the Council should be doing anyway. Why is this happening and who agrees the guidelines for EDB spending?

6e) Getting EDB work done quickly

After long delays and many problems with EDB work, tenants were assured that jobs would be completed within the year, but work is still taking longer than this. This is frustrating and demoralising for residents, and detracts from the overall benefit that comes from the EDB.

Why is this still happening, and what can be done to improve the situation?

6f) Conflict of interest between tenants and leaseholders

It was noted that there can be a conflict of interest between tenants and leaseholders over the Estate Development Budget. If work is not essential and leaseholders will incur costs, they are unlikely to agree it. This causes friction between members of the Residents' Association, and can have repercussions for the overall smooth running of the Residents' Association.

It was agreed that this is a difficult issue, and needed more discussion about how the EDB was organised, and if there was a way of preventing this conflict within Resident Associations.

It was agreed to ask that when EDB bids are put in, the Association is clearly informed about the implications of their bids for leaseholders.

Action: *Ill for all Blue Pages and discussion at Area Panel.*

Response from Becky Purnell, Resident Involvement Manager, Tel: 01273 293022

6a) As discussed at the May EDB Panel the Panel can only make recommendations and do not make decisions on policy. The Terms of Reference of the Panel were recirculated to clarify this, one of the purposes of the Panel in, *“to review the processes for the Estate Development Budget and make recommendations for improvements”*. The Panel is currently working on the EDB review and will be contacting the Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs) to get their views. A report will be going to the Involvement & Empowerment Service Improvement Group in September, before going to the November / December Area Panels.

6b) The EDB Panel have always been really clear about the agreed process, one bid up to the value of £750 should be a quick bid, proposals that cost more than this must be a main bid. Clarification regarding rolling bids is part of the EDB review.

6c) EDB bids are not submitted by officers or individuals and ensuring there has been proper consultation is an important part of the checking process undertaken by the Resident Involvement Team. Some seniors housing schemes have no TRA, however bids are put forward at coffee mornings. There is wide support that areas without an association are entitled to EDB. There have been some bids from these areas. Often these areas are blocks that are particularly run down. The Resident Involvement Officer lets people know there will be survey/ s / and sometimes meeting/s and once there is evidence that the majority of people agree to a bid the form is submitted. Consultation about EDB is part of the review.

Response from Glyn Huelin, Business & Performance Manager, Property & Investment, Tel: 01273 293306

6d) Guidelines for EDB spending are agreed by Area Panels. This is currently being reviewed as part of the Resident Involvement review. The 2015/16 EDB guidance is:

“An Estate Development Budget (EDB) bid can be placed by resident associations or groups of tenants that have an idea for a community project that results in one of the following:

- an improvement to a council housing owned building or community facility
- an improvement to council housing owned land or local environment
- an improvement that benefits the community and the quality of life of tenants

6e) The EDB Panel of residents reviews progress against the work programme with council officers and staff from Mears on a monthly basis. In recent years the number of outstanding jobs has significantly reduced. Having said this some bids do take too long to complete and the Panel will work to improve the speed of completing jobs.

6f) Some bids will have implications for leaseholders, in particular when they relate to work to common ways in blocks. The EDB guidance includes a short paragraph on leaseholders which provides some helpful information for residents preparing bids:

“Do leaseholders have to contribute towards the cost of work?”

The cost of Estate Development Budget work is passed on to leaseholders in their service charge in the same way as any other work. However:

- leaseholders contribute only to costs incurred at their building
- leaseholders will only incur costs if their lease allows for the charge
- the law says that the costs must be reasonably incurred

This means that works to keep the building in repair such as flooring, painting or improvements like exterior lighting are normally passed on, but works to improve community facilities or the local environment are not. For more information contact the Leasehold Team on 01273 293074, as they can give general advice on leaseholder charges before a bid is placed.”

Three star items from the North Tenant Only meeting held on 03/05/16

1. **Setting start and end dates for repairs and improvements**

The meeting felt that residents still don't receive clear and up-to-date information about when repair and improvement work will commence and when it will be completed. It is understood that sometimes these dates have to be moved. However, it is reasonable for residents to be advised of planned start and finish dates, and for them to be updated when these dates have to be changed.

This was previously raised in the Blue Pages for the Area Panels on 10th December 2015 and 4th February 2016, but the meeting felt that this matter is still not fully resolved.

Action 1: *It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and request what procedures are in place to inform residents of changes to start and end dates for planned work.*

Response from Scott Lunn, General Building Manager, Tel: 01273 290282

As previously stated, timescales for individual projects are subject to change depending on need and overall assessment. There can be various reasons for this which can be explained as and when this happens such as any urgent work identified or budget restraints. The majority of city wide projects are also subject to statutory leaseholder consultation and we are required by law to ensure we have taken full regard to any leaseholder observations before we can issue any task order or instruction to the contractors. Therefore, no confirmation of start dates can be issued until the leaseholder consultation is completed.

Where a project or repairs are not subject to leaseholder consultation, there can also be instances where priorities can change. Where this happens we will endeavour to inform tenant representatives and explain the reasons for the changes.

We are committed to improve our communications with tenants and where any specific update for repairs, or an individual project, or stream of work is required, you can also request information using the agreed tenant representative process.

Please note that for all Area Panel meetings a member of the Property & Investment Team will be in attendance along with Mears where questions can also be raised regarding possible delays to works.

2. Scaffolding

The meeting discussed the responses that had been given to their previous queries, but felt that there are still instances when scaffolding is left up for longer than it needs to be, and that there were two outstanding questions relating to payments to scaffolding contractors and fines imposed.

Action: III

It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and request the following information:

- a. Is Mears charged for scaffolding by the job (irrespective of how long the scaffolding is left up) or is there a charge per day, week or month?*
- b. Has Mears fined any of the scaffolding contractors for leaving scaffolding up after Mears have requested that it be taken down? What is the procedure for imposing such fines?.*

Response from Delia Hills, Mears Resident Liaison Manager, Tel: 01273 574354

2a – Mears are charged in accordance with contract rates and set framework agreements with contractors for the supply and erection of scaffold. This is a one off charge regardless of length of time that the scaffold is erected.

2b – Scaffold contractors are instructed to strike a scaffold on completion of works Post Inspection. Contractors have two weeks in which to strike, if they fail to meet the set deadline date they are charged by Mears for any compliance checks that Mears scaffold inspectors carry out. To date the duration from instructed to strike has been achieved by all contractors and there has not been a requirement to charge for any compliance checks.

3. Estate Development Budget - fencing

The meeting discussed the response from Mears, which stated EDB work sometimes has to be deprioritised so that 'boundary' fencing work (with health & safety or vulnerability issues) can be done.

Barbara reported on a discussion she had had, where she was told that there is a separate budget and a separate team responsible for 'boundary work'.

Action: III (3 stars)

It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel, and clarification be requested on whether 'Boundary' fencing work is done by the same team as EDB fencing work, or by a different team.

Response from Delia Hills, Mears Resident Liaison Manager, Tel: 01273 574354

To clarify, there is a separate health and safety fencing budget, however the same Mears operatives that undertake EDB fencing carry out the boundary health and safety work.

5. Pricing policy

The meeting felt that there is still a general problem with Mears' charges being very high. Three examples were given: replacement of a greenhouse in East Central Moulsecoomb area; removal of a silver birch tree in Broadfields; the water feature filter at Laburnum Grove.

The meeting felt that this could be resolved through resident involvement in the preparation of the specification for work and the pricing for each job. It was also felt that this would ensure that the specifications for EDB work fully match the proposals originally put together by Associations. It was also suggested that the EDB bidding process would be more effective if:

- a) the specifications and quotes were put together before the meeting*
- b) Associations receive details of all the bids in advance so they can discuss them. This would need to be at least one week before the EDB meeting, but 2 weeks would be ideal.*

Action: III (3 stars)

It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel with a view to discussing the following proposal for all EDB bids.

Those representatives of Residents Associations should:

- a) be involved in the preparation of specifications for EDB work to ensure that officers fully understand the nature of the work requested;*
- b) be invited to view the quotes for work, so they can query and/or clarify any instances where they feel the quote is too high or too low;*
- c) Receive a full list of EDB bids for their area at least one week (but ideally 2 weeks) before the EDB meeting.*

Response from Keith Dadswell, Responsive & EDB Project Manager, Tel: 01273 574382

Upon submitting a main bid a series of checks are undertaken prior to Mears involvement these include Property & Investment's programmed and capital works checks. Mears receive the approved bids and using the information provided, site visits and meetings with tenants associations (TAs) compile a costing to undertake proposed works. The level of information provided by the TAs to support main bids is improving year on year and Mears encourages TAs to be involved in the specifications, designs of any potential main bids.

The majority of EDB work carried out is in accordance with contract schedule of rates, any specialist works will be specified and sent to Mears' subcontractors for quotation as per contract requirements. The costs are then presented at the EDB Area Panels. It would be possible for the TAs to be aware of the applied costs prior to Area Panel however Mears would require the bids to be received sooner to allow for any changes or to obtain alternative costs if the TA is in disagreement.

In response to item c) Resident Associations should receive a full list of EDB bids for their area at least one week (but ideally 2 weeks) before the EDB meeting.

6. *Washing machines*

The previous contract for provision of laundries expired 6 months ago, and there is still no clear information about what the council plans to do next.

Residents previously raised concerns about the proposed switch from a standard charge included with the rent to a card payment system. However, there doesn't seem to be any clear resolution to this.

Residents are also not clear about what the process is for starting a new contract, although it is understood that a final decision has been made by officers.

Action: *III (3 stars)*

It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and to ask the following questions:

- a) How much has the consultation on this matter cost?*
- b) Has a final decision been made about the future of the laundry service, or are there still ongoing discussions?*
- c) If a decision has been made, what is it?*
- d) If a decision hasn't yet been made, what options are being considered?*

Response from Robert Nayan, Project Manager, Tel: 01273 293021

a) There has been no direct financial cost incurred during this consultation besides officer time and administration.

b) The future of this service is that the council will continue to provide laundry facilities in blocks which have such facilities. This was communicated to residents and at the Senior Housing Action Group (SHAG) during the recent consultation.

The procurement for the new contract is underway and we anticipate an appointment of a new service provider by the end of December 2016 and to start the new contract on 1 April 2017.

c) The decision has been made by the council that the amount for the laundry service for senior housing residents is to remain within the tenant's service charge. General needs laundries have different systems in place.

We are returning to the SHAG meeting on the 13th July 2016 to present the decision reached by the Housing Leadership Team. We remain committed to this agreement.

7. Future of Homing In

There was concern that the paper version of Homing In might be withdrawn in favour of an online publication, and that this would exclude residents who do not have computers.

Action: III

It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and to ask if any guarantee can be given that this is not being actively considered.

Response from Diane Hughes, Performance & Improvement Manager, Tel: 01273 293841

The Central Area Panel representatives have previously raised concerns about Homing In and a three star response was included in the report packs for Area Panels held in November and December 2015.

Further to this response the Homing In Editorial Board are now carrying out the review alongside council officers. Without prejudging the outcome of such a review we know that some residents may not have access to the internet or computers and we are not currently considering withdrawing a paper copy for all residents. However in order to achieve value for money it is important that we look for opportunities to increase our online readership and we will be investigating ways to achieve this.

7. Sub-contractor overcharging

The meeting discussed the money that Mears had been overcharged by a sub-contractor. The figures of £500,000 and £300,000 were given.

It is Mears' responsibility to ensure this money is repaid to the council and recent reports state that only £140,000 has been repaid to date.

It was also reported that the council auditors are now going to scrutinise other aspects of the Mears contract.

Action: III

It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and details be requested on how much of the overcharged money has been paid back, and what action is being taken to recover the full amount.

Response from Glyn Huelin, Business & Performance Manager, Tel: 01273 293306

In May 2015 the council's in-house contract compliance team discovered overpayments were being made to one sub-contractor working on responsive repairs. Since then housing staff have been working proactively with Mears and the council's internal auditors to put the service back on track.

The council has taken steps to recover the overpayments owed to the council and improve the controls and inspection regime with our contractor and their sub-contractors. The council has received a total repayment of £513,113 related to the overcharge. This is made up of a sum of £274,866 for repairs post April 2014 and a sum £238,247 relating to the repairs undertaken by this subcontractor before April 2014.

Mears provide a comprehensive responsive repairs, planned maintenance and major works service for council homes across the city under a 10-year contract. Around 20% of the annual contract is responsive repairs and approximately 4% of the annual cost relates to sub-contracted responsive repairs. The overcharging was isolated to a single sub-contractor working on a small proportion of responsive repairs.

The sub-contractor involved with the overpayments no longer works with Mears and the council is now working with Mears to strengthen processes and procedures to prevent any reoccurrence.

This includes reducing the amount of sub-contracted work (currently around 30% of responsive repairs contracted work) and having a new quality assurance manager within the Mears Team.

The Housing & New Homes Committee reviewed this in January 2016 and has requested a bi-annual report to members of the committee to make sure that the contract is operating effectively.

An update report will also be shared with Area Panels.

A follow-up audit will also be carried out in this financial year.