

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

3.00pm 14 JUNE 2010

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Caulfield (Chairman); Allen, Kennedy, Marsh, Mears, Pidgeon, Randall, Simson and Smart

Tenant Representatives: Stewart Gover (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), Ted Harman (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), Heather Hayes (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), John Stevens (Central Area Housing Management Panel), Pat Miles (West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel), Beverley Weaver (West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel), John Melson (Hi Rise Action Group), Barry Kent (Tenant Disability Network) and Trish Barnard (Central Area Housing Management Panel). Chris El-Shabba was invited to attend to make a presentation on the Tenant Handbook Review. Chris Kift attended to provide assistance/cover for John Melson on some of the items.

PART ONE

1. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

1A Declarations of Substitute Members

1.1 Councillor Marsh declared that she was attending as a substitute for Councillor Simpson. Councillor Kennedy declared that she was attending as a substitute for Councillor Fryer. Councillor Smart declared that he was attending as a substitute for Councillor Barnett. John Stevens attended as a deputy as there is currently a vacancy for a representative from the Central Area Housing Management Panel. Trish Barnard attended as a substitute for Beryl Snelling. Chris Kift attended to provide support/cover for John Melson on some of the items.

1B Declarations of Interests

1.2 Heather Hayes, Ted Harman and Trish Barnard 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).

1C Exclusion of the Press and Public

- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 2.1 John Melson made the following observations. Paragraph 94.2 – He made the point that he was referring to problems with windows in a nearby block. Paragraph 94.10 – He had asked for Members as well as tenants representatives to be given advance notice if there was to be a further presentation on the progress of the partnership. Paragraph 98.1 – He wished this to be changed to read “vote of thanks to Councillor Wells for his long and dedicated service to this Committee and the Council in general.”
- 2.2 Ted Harman made the following observations. Paragraph 87.5 - He reported that the meeting held on 24 May 2010 had been successful and that Baker Tilley had been appointed as financial consultants. Paragraph 87.5 – A second Choice Based Review Meeting had been held and had gone well.
- 2.3 Chris Kift referred to Paragraph 87.3 – He reported that he had attended the lunch on 24 May to meet with members of the Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes Ltd Board. He stated that he would like to see all Board members at the HMCC.
- 2.4 Stewart Gover referred to Paragraph 97.12. He stressed that the Committee had asked for inappropriate clamping to be reviewed and for Robert Keelan to ensure that he did not arrange the meetings of the Car Parks and Garages Working Group on the same day as the HMCC. John Austin-Locke confirmed that the Car Parks and Garages Working Group had originally been arranged for 14 June. The meeting had now been re-arranged to a date next week.
- 2.5 John Austin-Locke confirmed that a diary of tenants meetings was on the Council website. This would be kept up to date. He stressed that paper copies could become out of date very quickly as meeting dates changed frequently. However, paper copies could be made available to tenants without internet access.
- 2.6 Councillor Mears referred to Paragraph 87.1. She thanked the tenants for organising a very successful and professional City Assembly. With regard to paragraph 86.3, she made the point that there would be no need to write any further letters to John Denham, following the General Election.
- 2.7 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2010 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS**Council House Building**

- 3.1 The Chairman reported that the council was planning to build more council properties. Officers were in the process of mapping land. The Ainsworth House site was vacant and was being investigated. Martin Reid would work with tenants and would set up a Working Group to discuss the project.

Gas Meters

- 3.2 The Chairman reported that there has been a comment at an Area Panel that when gas meters were installed, there was no regard to people with disabilities or the elderly. They were installed at a low level and many people could not bend down to read the meters. The Chairman asked the Assistant Director, Housing Management to arrange for a letter to be sent to all relevant energy suppliers regarding this problem.

Cut Backs

- 3.3 Stewart Gover asked for tenant representatives to be kept informed on how tenants might be affected by future cut backs. The Chairman replied that it would be a few weeks before it would be known if there were to be any changes. She suggested that there could be a briefing for September 2010.

4. CALLOVER

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

5. PETITIONS

- 5.1 There were none.

6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- 6.1 There were none.

7. DEPUTATIONS

- 7.1 There were none.

8. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 8.1 There were none.

9. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 9.1 There were none.

10. RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT FROM DCLG: COUNCIL HOUSING: A REAL FUTURE

- 10.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Finance & Resources & the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise which provided a summary of the proposals to reform the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) subsidy system as set out in the consultation document 'Council Housing: A Real Future' issued on 25 March 2010 by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The report highlighted the likely financial implications, risks and benefits to the council from the proposal and provided the council's draft response to the consultation as attached in Appendix 1.
- 10.2 Councillor Allen welcomed the report and hoped there would be cross party agreement on this matter. However, he queried the current government's position and wondered how much of the current proposals would survive. The Assistant Director, Housing Management reported that the Housing Minister had written to all Local Authorities urging them to respond to the consultative process. The Government had indicated support for the end of the subsidy system and were in the process of reviewing the consultation responses.
- 10.3 Councillor Allen referred to paragraph 3.39. He asked how the LDV would fit in with the proposals. Would it become redundant? The Assistant Director, Housing Management explained that if the council moved to self financing, it would still have significant expenditure. If the council did not have the LDV, it would have to borrow money. The current position was that the LDV was very positive for the council.
- 10.4 Councillor Mears made the point that self financing would not produce enough money to improve homes. The LDV would serve its purpose and would bring in extra revenue for housing. Meanwhile, she encouraged members to embrace the proposals set out in the report. There was a need to invest in housing stock.
- 10.5 The Chairman welcomed the report and stressed that the council still needed the LDV. The money was needed for improvements to council housing. The proposals would give the council control over the money that it spent.
- 10.6 Councillor Randall welcomed the proposals. However he agreed that the LDV should be kept ongoing as there was no guarantee that the proposals would be implemented. He suggested that the LDV could be used for other purposes such as helping private owners as well as council tenants.
- 10.7 Councillor Kennedy considered that in principle the proposals were good news. She hoped that employment for building new council houses would remain local. The Chairman concurred and stated that this issue could be discussed at the new working group.
- 10.8 Councillor Mears stressed that the new housing contract with Mears Ltd had secured local apprenticeships and local jobs.

- 10.9 Stewart Gover mentioned that Wokingham Borough Council was financially in a similar position to Brighton & Hove. Right to Buy had affected them badly. He supported the proposals.
- 10.10 Beverley Weaver asked how self financing would affect rents. The Chairman referred to paragraph 3.32. The assumption was that councils would keep to the national rent policy.
- 10.11 Chris Kift stated that he hoped that new council housing would be built to high standards.
- 10.12 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the proposals for self financing of the HRA as set out in the DCLG Consultation paper ‘Council Housing: A Real Future’ issued on 25 March 2010, be supported.
- (2) That Cabinet is recommended to approve the council’s formal response to the consultation, as attached at Appendix 1, supporting the proposal to move to self financing for the HRA.

11. HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

- 11.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise concerning the progress made in the delivery of the Housing Management Service Improvement Plan 2009-12.
- 11.2 Councillor Marsh remarked that Turning the Tide was proving very positive and useful. Resident participation was important. She asked about the next steps involved in rolling out Turning the Tide to other areas of the city. Councillor Marsh stated that she hoped that the Super Centre would meet the timetable and be opened on 10 September.
- 11.3 The Chairman reported that some of the Turning the Tide work had already been rolled out to other areas. The plan was always to introduce the scheme across the city. The Assistant Director, Housing Management reported that certain elements of Turning the Tide were city wide, for example the Anti-Social Behaviour Team and the Tenancy Sustainment Team. The pilot would be coming to an end in July and would be evaluated. A report would be submitted to the HMCC in the autumn. However, what was appropriate to Moulsecomb and Whitehawk would not necessarily be appropriate to other areas. Meanwhile, a surgery approach with reception areas had been successful elsewhere.
- 11.4 Chris Kift stated that Turning the Tide was a brilliant idea. However, it was a diverse city and one size would not fit all. A number of problems needed to be addressed.
- 11.5 Heather Hayes expressed concern about how some of the council’s properties could be brought up to decent home standards when many families were in band C and the conditions were very cramped. The Chairman replied that there were not enough large family houses. She was pleased to hear that housing targets would be scrapped. This would provide an opportunity to deliver family sized housing.
- 11.6 Heather Hayes asked about work in progress to help people downsize when their properties were too big for them. The Chairman mentioned that the Under Occupation Officer was working with people to help them downsize. However, the supply of suitable

housing was not becoming available. The use of private sector housing had increased substantially.

- 11.7 Beverley Weaver mentioned that an 82 year old living in a three bedroom flat in Park Court was struggling to cope, but felt he was too old to move. There needed to be a system in place to help elderly people down size. The Chairman replied that people could not be forced to move and suggested that details of the case be given to the Assistant Director, Housing Management.
- 11.8 Councillor Randall thought that there were many positive aspects to the report. He liked the Turning the Tide approach. Councillor Randall mentioned that the Netherlands had a system of community safety assessment of estates. This was a way of helping the police distribute their resources. Councillor Randall stated that he thought the government should stop the sale of council houses.
- 11.9 John Melson supported the LDV. He agreed with Councillor Randall about the sale of council houses, and considered that more council housing needed to be built.
- 11.10 Stewart Gover raised a number of concerns and issues that had been discussed in Homing In. He mentioned that a number of tenants from other authorities were being sent to Brighton & Hove. He reported that the Asset Management Panel was not tenant led. He thought that there needed to be a meeting of the Repairs and Maintenance Monitoring Group. He raised concerns about the frail occupants of Patching Lodge. The Chairman explained that Patching Lodge was a care issue rather than a council house issue. She suggested Mr Gover spoke to The Assistant Director of Housing Management about this matter.
- 11.11 Councillor Mears considered the report to be excellent. She stressed that people did receive help in downsizing and that the Empty Property Officer provided a good service.
- 11.12 Councillor Simson stressed the importance of treating each tenant as an individual when considering downsizing. Each tenant had different needs. She suggested that older people could be offered a personal service. Councillor Simson also made the point that people did not like moving out of area.
- 11.13 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the progress during year two of the improvement plan be noted.

12. TENANT HANDBOOK REVIEW

- 12.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise which presented the results of the tenant led Chairman's Working Group review of the tenant handbook for tenants living in council housing. Members received a presentation from Chris El-Shabba and Adrian Channon, Housing Manager on the proposed draft of the new tenant handbook, which was attached to the report.
- 12.2 Chris Kift commended the draft but asked for trimming to be included under Grounds Maintenance on page 29 of the handbook (page 89 of the agenda). He stressed that there also needed to be an update of the Repairs Handbook.

- 12.3 Stewart Gover noted that a great deal of work had gone into the production of the draft handbook. He mentioned his concern about the current succession rules. The Chairman stressed that the council had to work within the law. Meanwhile, there was an incentive scheme available to help tenants downsize set out on page 41 of the handbook (page 101 of the agenda).
- 12.4 Councillor Marsh commended the people who had compiled the handbook. It was a good comprehensive guide. She asked how the handbook would be accessed by tenants who were blind or partially sighted. The Assistant Director, Housing Management reported that the handbook would be provided in different formats, including an audio guide. Tenants could also request a translation.
- 12.5 Councillor Smart referred to page 48 (108 of the agenda) and expressed concern at the number of 292929 phone numbers. The Chairman agreed that this was an issue that needed to be addressed.
- 12.6 John Stevens asked for clarification on the advice given in the section on Fire Safety. For example, under *Fires in the Home*, the advice was to 'get everyone out of your home and close the door after you'. In the section *If a fire breaks out elsewhere in your building* it advised "If there is a fire elsewhere in the building you are usually safest in your own flat'. The Chairman asked the Housing Manager to check this section before printing the final version.
- 12.7 Stewart Gover expressed concern about the right of officers to enter tenants' homes. The Chairman stated that this could be checked by the council's lawyers.
- 12.8 The Housing Manager stated that the comments of members would be taken on board. The handbook would be reviewed on a regular basis. For example, changes in legislation would be needed to be taken into account.
- 12.9 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the conclusions of the working group outlined in the report and the tenant presentation be noted.
- (2) That the new version of the tenant handbook attached at appendix 1 be endorsed and forwarded to the Housing Cabinet Member for approval.

13. CONSULTATION DRAFT OF RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

- 13.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise which provided a copy of the consultation draft of the Resident Involvement strategy for council housing residents, as agreed with the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group (TCMG). Following approval, a wider process of consultation would begin throughout the City. The Policy & Performance Manager thanked the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group for their help in developing the consultation draft.
- 13.2 John Melson considered the report to be sequential and clear. However he stressed that although there was a strategy, there was a need for a policy and money to fund a policy. The present participation strategy did not work. He recommended that the report should be accepted on a conditional basis. He suggested it was revisited after the work had been completed on the Annual Report. Mr Melson considered that one

strategy would not fit all areas, and the work should be done piece by piece and developed to fit all areas.

- 13.3 The Assistant Director, Housing Management stressed that this was the first draft of the strategy. It was the period for tenants to say what they wanted done differently. It was an important piece of work which would ensure that tenants were more involved in the running of their service. He wanted every member of staff to work with tenants in improving the service.
- 13.4 Councillor Simson mentioned that at the Area Panels it had been suggested that the strategy should be renamed Council Residents or Tenants and Leaseholders Involvement Strategy, in order to avoid confusion. Pat Miles stated that she thought it should be Tenants and Leaseholders Involvement Strategy. She stressed the need for more leaseholders to get involved.
- 13.5 Pat Miles asked for more information about the Focus Group and stated that the West area representatives had not been informed about this group. The Chairman explained that John Austin-Locke co-ordinated the Focus Group. She stated that there needed to be a proper system in place to ensure all residents were involved. The Chairman agreed that West representatives should have been kept informed. The Policy and Performance Manager agreed to talk to all groups and to investigate this matter.
- 13.6 Councillor Pidgeon asked for the strategy to be available in Braille and audio. The Assistant Director stated that the strategy would be available in Braille and other formats.
- 13.7 Councillor Allen referred to the second bullet point of page 131 – *Also you would like to be involved in.* (Page 8 of the document). He considered that more needed to be done in relation to involvement. The Assistant Director of Housing Management reported that as a result of the resident survey, the council now held a data base of 2000 residents. The Chairman referred to the report on the Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Survey brought to the last meeting of the HMCC. She asked for this to be forwarded to Councillor Allen.
- 13.8 Councillor Allen referred to page 140 (page 17 of the strategy). He asked how grants allocated to Residents Associations and the Resource Centre compared to grants allocated in the last few years. The Assistant Director replied that he would obtain the historical figures for Councillor Allen.
- 13.9 Councillor Mears stressed that the council valued the work of the Resource Centre and their grant had been increased.
- 13.10 Stewart Gover stated that he would like to see more involvement from residents as long as their views were funnelled through the tenants' elected representatives.
- 13.11 John Melson asked for a restoration of the members' vote on the HMCC. The Chairman stated that this had not changed. There was a members' vote which had been used on a number of occasions. Tenants Representatives could have an indicative vote. The Senior Lawyer confirmed that the constitution allowed elected members to vote as individuals on the HMCC.

13.12 The Chairman asked for any further comments to be forwarded to the Policy and Performance Manager.

13.13 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the process of consultation on the draft of the Resident Involvement Strategy be endorsed to commence, as outlined in the timetable in appendix 1.

(2) That following the period of consultation, a revised document is presented to Housing Management Consultative Committee.

14. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE 2010 ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS

14.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise which explained that the Council was to produce an annual report to all tenants and leaseholders on its performance as landlord and setting out its plans and service offer to tenants for 2010/11. The report set out the plan and timetable for involving residents in producing and scrutinising this annual report for the year ending 31 March 2010. It also outlined the proposed approach and timetable for involving tenants and leaseholders in developing local service offers.

14.2 The Housing Stock Review Manager reported that she had given presentations on the outline plan and timetable for the annual report and developing local service offers to tenant and leaseholder representatives at the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group, the City Assembly and all four Area Panels. A Special HMCC had been arranged for 1 September 2010 to scrutinise and sign off the final draft before the Annual Report was submitted to the Cabinet Member for approval on 8 September.

14.3 John Melson stated that he would agree the report in principle, subject to further discussion and agreement in September.

14.4 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the plan and timetable set out in Appendix 1 to this report for involving residents in producing and scrutinising the annual report to tenants and leaseholders for the year ending 31 March 2010, be noted.

(2) That the outline plan and timetable set out in paragraphs 3.4 to 3.6 to the report for involving residents in developing and agreeing local offers for service delivery, be noted.

15. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE UPDATE

15.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise which provided a progress report on the review of the grounds maintenance service on housing management owned land. The Committee was informed that the scope of the review was large and complex so the aim was to have the revised service in place by April 2011. A revised service specification for the grounds maintenance would be developed with City Parks using pilot locations to test and cost out the service improvements. The revised service would be benchmarked with other authorities in order to demonstrate that the new service delivered value for money.

- 15.2 Heather Hayes complained that in Hollingdean, banks were full of weeds and that edges were left when the grass was cut. Fences were covered in weeds and weeds were growing across paths which was dangerous for disabled people who could trip over them. She had asked for work to be carried out on banks and had been told it was a health and safety issue as specialist equipment was required.
- 15.3 The Chairman agreed that there was general dissatisfaction with grass cutting. She referred to paragraph 1.3 of the report. It was proposed to have a revised service specification for the grounds maintenance service, and to ensure value for money.
- 15.4 Councillor Randall welcomed the proposals and suggested that it would be an opportunity to work in new areas such as vegetable plots. It would also be an opportunity to look at security on estates.
- 15.5 **RESOLVED** – That the contents of the report be noted.
- 16. HOUSING MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT - END OF YEAR (AND QUARTER 4)**
- 16.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise which set out the fourth and final quarter for Housing Management performance for the financial year 2009/10. End of year figures were presented either as a collective figure for the year or as final end of year figure against a previously set target. The requirements of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) would entail a change in the presentation of the report in the coming year. Therefore officers would be reviewing performance reports during 2010 to ensure that they provided tenants and leaseholders a full picture of the council's performance.
- 16.2 The Chairman asked for her thanks to be passed on to officers for the performance result for rent collection. 98.29% represented a large amount of money.
- 16.3 Councillor Allen was pleased to note that all areas were performing well. However, he took issue with the bullet point RIEN: Rental Income Excellence Network. He considered this to be jargon. The Assistant Director, Housing Management agreed that this could be taken out of the next report as it served no purpose.
- 16.4 Councillor Allen questioned why there was not more information from comparative authorities, particularly in relation to those indicators on page 167. The Assistant Director, Housing Management replied that benchmarking data was not available for those indicators at the moment.
- 16.5 With regard to empty home turnaround time, John Melson hoped that officers would not be concentrating on quantity at the expense of quality. With regard to anti-social behaviour, Mr Melson remarked that the figures only related to Turning the Tide. The Assistant Director explained that the figures were relevant to anti-social behaviour across the city.
- 16.6 **RESOLVED** – That the contents of the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 5.47pm

Signed

Chairman

Dated this

day of