

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
HOUSING MANAGEMENT PANEL: CENTRAL AREA

2.00pm 20 FEBRUARY 2019

BARNARD CENTRE

MINUTES

Present: Councillors

Voting Representatives:

Non-Voting Delegates:

Officers:

Guests:

59 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

59.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

60 APOLOGIES

60.1 There were no apologies.

61 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

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61.1 The Chair stated the sad news that two regular attendees of this Panel: Les Wakeling and Christina Hadleigh had passed away and led a 1 minute silence in their memory. He said of Christina Hadleigh that she was one of a kind and he would miss her spirited passion.

The Chair then gave the following communications:

- Although it was not a new organisation since the Chair had been involved setting it up 18 years ago, he confirmed it was now new for Brighton & Hove and enabled low cost training and gave the opportunity to taking advantage of training opportunities.
- Regarding the Agenda for programme, which was set by a tenant survey, there was a follow-up on the budget discussed at the Resident Only meeting. He confirmed that the wi-fi shelter was going ahead and that they hoped to expand resources for the EDB but sadly this did not get passed by the PRG – as they were told that there was not enough demand for this.

- On a positive note, an extra £7 million investment was confirmed to acquire more council homes and buy buildings for use as emergency homeless accommodation.
- Regarding the question of buying back housing stock, the home purchasing policy has now been doubled from 3.5 to 7 million in order to buy building to replace Windsor Court and Percival Terrace
- The Chair of Housing, Councillor Anne Meadows is no longer a member of Labour and has joined the conservative party. The Chair stated that there was a lot of turmoil and that he guessed that the deputy Chair Tracey Hill may be appointed as Head of the Housing Committee
- It was announced that Martin Reid had taken on the new role of Assistant Head of Housing.

62 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 62.1 The following amendment was confirmed: Instead of: "Officers suggested that"it should instead read: – "It was suggested and the Chair was invited"
- 62.2 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record with the above amendment.

63 RESIDENTS QUESTION TIME

1. HRA Budget pl.11

- 63.1 It was noted that this had been missed this in previous years and the Chair enjoyed the meeting and was grateful to come along. The Chair also stated that if re elected, he would try and work for more thorough consultation on budgets in future.

2. Consultation with non-resident leaseholders p. 13

- 63.2 A resident was not happy about the written response from Martin Reid, who was not present at this point of the meeting. The Chair stated that they would wait on Martin Reid to reply on the query regarding non-resident leaseholders.

3. Estate inspections and Resident Involvement p. 17

4. Repairs service contract – over sight p.19

5. Resident inspectors – info on cost work p. 23

6. Social Housing Green paper p. 25

7. East Central Mouslecoomb Tenant & Residents Association – dispute p.26

8. The repairs contract – p. 28

- 63.3 No other comments were made on the above points 3 – 8

64 THE FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS FOR REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

- 64.1 Sharon Davies introduced this report, highlighting the fact that they were keen to continue engagement and would like to form a working group and enable a "Task & Finish group to be set up. She stated that the Home group currently worked closely

with Officer regarding the contract with Mears, but had a busy agenda and that a separate group which was more appropriate to report to the Area panels was also required. The groups would consist of up to 12 reps as stated on page 34 and that at today's meeting they would like a nomination from the Central Area panel. She confirmed that the Group would meet on a monthly basis from March 2019 – April 2020 in order to assist officers in designing the repair service, communication and procurement, which also involved evaluating tenders and would require reps to sign a confidentiality agreement. Sharon circulated a written briefing handout to reps so that they could nominate a rep at the meeting.

- 64.2 A resident asked whether the monthly meetings were held during working hours and Sharon replied that some people may not be required to attend all meetings which involved reading tenders and therefore it may be possible to split the group up and to have evening meetings at some times, if required. She also confirmed that reps could be non resident leaseholders.
- 64.3 Resident rep Jane Thorp – Hanover RA Chair nominated herself and this was seconded.
- 64.4 **RESOLVED:** That the Panel voted in Jane Thorp as representative on the Task and Finish group.

65 UPDATE ON THE EDB REVIEW

- 65.1 Hilary Edgar gave a brief summary of the EDB Review highlighting that from a recent audit, they had picked up on the dissatisfaction on the timescale and value of and decided to introduce a reduction in the maximum value of bids. They also planned to prioritise seniors housing. She confirmed that there had already been seven meetings since July 2018 and that Barry Hughes, Carl Boardman and Jason Williams were the reps from this area. Hilary confirmed that the Budget would remain the same for this year and that 3 main points had been actioned: Firstly the reduction in the budget had not happened. Secondly that from 2020 repairs will be carried out in house and that the EDB would also be taken over by the Council. Thirdly, the environmental improvement budget was approved at £500K (as stated in the table in Appendix B on p. 43) so that the maximum level of bids could stay the same for at least a year. She confirmed that bids would remain the same initially and that there would be more time to look at issues in order to help people make better policy bids as summarised on page 43. She also highlighted the budget set up for Seniors housing as decided by SHAG and which was supported by Roy Crowhurst as a trial. She also highlighted points 5 and 6 regarding fencing since they wanted to introduce a sliding scale policy so that this was funded more consistently. Points 7 – 10 were also highlighted in order for applicants to track their bids and to make the best use of officers' time. They hoped to increase points allocated in order to encourage people to bid more within the year spend rather than carry them over to the following year and increase quick bids and communication in order to encourage bidders to keep in touch with groups more. Hilary explained that points 13 – 16 regarding the community chest scheme when there would be a maximum value on bids would not be in place until subsequent years. She also asked how area panels could be more open to residents and how the EDB money could be split between the different panel areas.

- 65.2 A resident asked about the quality of communication with Mears and they requested that Chairs of residents associations were put directly in contact with Mears, so that they could make their own decisions on the budget.
- 65.3 A resident confirmed that seniors housing had a different set of needs since there were communal lounges and communal gardens and therefore it was important that they were given more freedom and a separate budget allocation. Mears stated that they felt it was important to be involved with residents via panel s and a resident of Sylvan Hall stated that they felt they had good communication with Mears and that it was not all negative.
- 65.4 The Chair stated that the proposed budget of £183 K was for the Housing Committee to decide and that more participatory budgeting was very positive and should be encouraged in future. A resident stated that he was surprised that the environmental budget came up within this report, as it should not be linked to the overall budget. Hilary Edgar replied that it may have an impact on the budget.
- 65.5 A resident questioned item 16 of the list to be introduced on sharing budgets across areas, stating that it was contentious since they were up to their limit and another area required the funding then the budget may be allocated to another area and Hilary Edgar replied that different areas offered different opinions on this issue. She also confirmed that the budget for senior housing was not currently a separated fund.
- 65.6 **RESOLVED:** That the panel agreed to support the recommendations of the report.

66 FIELD OFFICERS

- 66.1 Annie Sparks updated on the Field Officer (FO) team – and introduced FOs Tom and Dario who also attended the meeting. She confirmed that they had been active since 3rd December 2018, that FOs work from 12 – 8pm over a 7-day rota and that all FOs were employed on annualised contracts to provide flexibility. She confirmed that they worked with a range of services including: city parks, planning, regulatory services, and housing and that FOs were getting out & about making referrals for repairs and anti-social behaviour (ASB) and responding to complaints. She emphasised that the FOs work should be fast & effective with housing colleagues working with FOs to get intelligence and information in order to make observations to inform more complex cases. She also confirmed that the FOs would be responsible for the new estate inspections and that Brett Stacey was attending area housing panel meetings with his colleagues in order to try and define a new model for estate inspections. She confirmed that this should be particular needs for the community and environmental improvements and was still a work in progress. It was also confirmed that Hilary Edgar had more information on the Don't Walk By policy that the FOs are involved in.
- 66.2 Annie Sparks confirmed that there were seven FOs already in post and working with other services and that the FO team were knocking on doors and carrying out problem solving field work in order to resolve residents issues. The aims were to resolve complaints more quickly and to understand why the complaints were happening. She also said that they had a committee report to be submitted to NICE in July and that there would be scrutiny around this.

- 66.3 A resident queried whether the FOs could assist with cars parked on the pavement obstructing the pedestrian right of way. Annie Sparks replied that FOs cannot enforce parking issues but could refer cases on.
- 66.4 A resident asked if FOs would deal with bicycle parking – where bikes were chained to a lamp post. Annie Sparks replied that the team had talked to colleagues in the Highways department and that they were already liaising with Parking about tagging abandoned bikes and parked bikes causing an obstruction near street lights and they were checking how these issues could be best reported.
- 66.5 A resident stated that on narrow pavements, the big wheelie bins were being left out, forcing pedestrians out into the road and was this an issue that the FO team could resolve. Annie Sparks replied that the FOs were not currently carrying out work for Cityclean but that it was likely that the FOs would gather evidence for Cityclean in the future.
- 66.6 A resident asked if the neighbourhood action plan would be linked in with the FO team and Annie replied that it was and that in addition the new PCSOs Karn and Chamberlin was keen that local policing plans were also linked to the neighbourhood actions plans in order to inform estate inspections and she confirmed that there had been good joint working already happening with the police. She also stated that there would be an article in the FO team in the next issue of Homing In.
- 66.7 A partially sighted resident reported the hazard of rubbish bins in the street and why they could not be located in a wider part of the road. Annie Sparks confirmed that this could be reported directly to Cityclean. She added that she hoped that the FO team will get to know residents and form relationships, so that they could be the eyes and ears for residents within the community.
- 66.8 A resident asked if FOs were attached to particular areas and Annie explained that they were based citywide and that they had access to buses and the city car club to access all areas quickly but that the team will look at whether it may be more appropriate to designate different areas to different FOs in the future. She confirmed the contact telephone number for the FO team was: tel: 01273 291485

67 ELECTIONS TO VACANT SEASIDE HOMES TRUSTEE POSITIONS

- 67.1 Hilary Edgar reminded residents that there were two positions available which had been advertised as a vacancy in Homing In. Two people – Barry Hughes and David Spafford from this Panel had been nominated. Barry Hughes stated that he welcomed the opportunity to have a fresh look at this local housing delivery vehicle. David Spafford felt the same and stated that with such a big housing need in Brighton, Seaside Homes may be able to assist in fulfilling some of the housing need. The Chair agreed with this, as he confirmed he was on the Board of Seaside Homes. The panel took a vote on the two vacancies.
- 67.2 **RESOLVED:** That David Spafford and Barry Hughes were voted in and confirmed as Trustees for Seaside Homes.

68 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT BUDGET

- 68.1 Hilary Edgar gave a brief summary of the Agenda Setting Meeting as there was no written report. The Chair stated that in the Resident Only meetings they had discussed the importance of involving residents in these meetings and that there was a desire to be able to feedback their views to ensure that the best improvements possible are actioned. He therefore encouraged more residents to attend the EDB voting meetings and thus could be directed by officers or those who turn up.
- 68.2 A resident commented on the decision to remove washing lines due to ground floor flats being overlooked and they felt that the decision was very top down or officer led. Hilary Edgar replied that this decision was made recently by the EDB and that they had a long list of themes and that the RI group had generated feedback from residents who did not usually attend the meetings and could have submitted this on their behalf. Barry Hughes stated that Homing In could be used better to explain the budget and involve more people, such as in the recent Spring Edition about the wildflower planting promotion in conjunction with Kew Gardens which implemented engagement with new people. Carl Boardman confirmed that this budget had come out of the EDB panel process and that the same issues, mainly around Health & Safety came up again and again and that he did not feel it was the best use of the funds. Hilary Edgar added that the EDB budget could pick up on areas not included in the main Housing budget. The Chair stated that Health & Safety was necessary and that it was important for residents to be consulted on improvements and that their views should be built in to the report to evaluate the projects.

69 HOUSING MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT

- 69.1 Hilary Edgar introduced a summary of this report.
- 69.2 A resident requested more information on the leaseholder costs stated on page 69.
- 69.3 A resident asked about the figure of 85% of calls which were answered, which was not good and was there a standard set that should be met. Hilary Edgar replied that this was not clear although the target was 90% and that the corporate stance was that we should resource email communication, which they had focussed on since the Summer of 2018 since more people were contacting the council via email and the aim was to get things properly resourced. The resident stated that the majority of residents depend on using the phone and that 5 min on hold was the reported average wait time.
- 69.4 A resident commented on the 5% of tenants who were in arrears of £500 plus and asked what kind of help they received. Hilary Edgar replied that the Income Management team offered advice and also referred tenants to the MAC Advice service and confirmed that one in five tenants were in arrears, which was a high percentage. There was a brief discussion on the different figures for arrears and the Chair pointed out that Universal Credit was one of the reasons for arrears and it was a massive challenge to provide support to those tenants transitioning into Universal Credit.

- 69.5 A resident also raised the point that it was now more difficult to obtain Discretionary Payments for under occupancy regarding the recent Bedroom tax and Hilary Edgar replied that this could be added as an item for the agenda for the next meeting.
- 69.6 A resident requested that there could be an item on a future meeting agenda on how easy it was for people to downsize – transfer to a smaller Council property.
- 69.7 A resident remarked on the alarmingly high level of ASB cases in Coombes Park ward as stated on page 76 and he questioned some of the context of the figures. He stated that it surely depended on how many council properties there were in different wards and that a figure stating the amount of ASB cases per number of properties would be more helpful.
- 69.8 **RESOLVED:** That the panel agreed to note the report.

70 CITY WIDE REPORTS

- 70.1 **RESOLVED:** That the panel agreed to note the reports.

71 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 71.1 Hilary Edgar said Leach Court had completed a successful EDB bid for curtains for the communal lounge area and would now like to switch to use the budget for electrical light fittings. She confirmed that it was OK to switch the funding and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of the change.
- 71.2 Hilary Edgar provided a handout with future Panel dates for the year.
- 71.3 Hilary Edgar confirmed that the EDB voting panel date needed to be communicated to all residents. She confirmed that there would not be any filming of bids, since there was enough money in the budget to cover all the panels.
- 71.4 The major projects of windows and external decoration for Somerset Point was still ongoing in spite of a long waiting time. Hilary Edgar confirmed that they were still waiting to hear back from Mears on the tender for windows and balcony doors and it was confirmed by residents that regarding the fittings, hinges had to be positioned on the outside, since the doors could not open inwards as this would restrict the floorspace. There was also a worry about the effects of being within a marine climate and Martin Reid confirmed that they would look for hinges that would not rust and were aiming at providing quotes in April.
- 71.5 A resident Anne Stewart stated that they had been waiting almost 10 weeks in total in order to get a quote on repainting front doors on flats. They were still waiting now for Dulux to get reassurance on what was required. It was resolved that it should now be sorted and that Jeff would call Anne shortly on this matter. Mears also confirmed that they would be recycling glass and original windows from these buildings,
- 71.6 The Chair confirmed that this was his last Panel as Chair before the elections and that he was keen to see the attendance continue, since the Central panel had not previously been well attended. However, since the attendance had increased, the Central Panel was now the best attended Housing Panel with the greatest increase in numbers. The Chair wished everyone Good Luck and Goodbye. Barry Hughes and

Bill Randall both stated that it was important that the Panels were chaired by those councillors who would be attending the Housing Committee. It puzzled the Panel that these rules were being followed but still not written into the statute. Hilary Edgar confirmed that she would pass this recommendation on to Democratic Services who would check the Area Panel terms of reference.

72 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

72.1 The date of the next meeting would be Wednesday 5th June 2019.

The meeting concluded at 3.51 pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of