

Central Area Panel January 2020

Responses to Resident's Questions

3 Star- Central

1. Maintenance and installation of external security doors in blocks of flat

Answers were requested to the following questions:

- Who is responsible for maintaining and repairing the main entrance doors in blocks of flats?
- Considering these are the main security doors, what is the maximum amount of time they should be repaired in?
- If doors break again days after being fixed, why are residents charged for the follow-up repair when this should have been done in the first instance?
- Why have such heavy and inefficient doors been chosen, without thought of their suitability for residents and the areas where they are fitted?
- How are these doors classed as being suitable and secure when breakdowns happen so often and residents are unable to open at times due to weather conditions?

Response

Glyn Huelin - Head of Housing – Repairs & Improvement

Thank you for your question and we are sorry for the issues which residents have experienced with the main doors. I have set out answers to your specific questions below:

- Our Repairs & Maintenance service undertake any repairs identified with specialist contractors.
- Repairs have emergency (one day) or routine (up to 20 days) priorities. Issues with the main door would be regarded as emergency. Main entrance doors have several different elements that may cause a fault and often require further investigation as to the cause. We are considering a 2- or 3-day repair time frame to be initiated with our contractors – subject to parts availability.
- We do consider what charges are passed onto residents and continuous faults are monitored accordingly. There are several factors that can impact on

the operation of doors including electrical faults or as a result of vandalism or misuse.

- The doors are designed with the security of residents in mind and do need to be robust and as a result can be heavy. The doors have hydraulic closers and where there is a requirement due to elderly residents, we do install an assisted opener/closer as a matter of course, where this is identified as being an issue prior to installation. These can also be retrofitted where needed.
- These doors have been installed correctly and have been reviewed. We are happy to work with residents around the ongoing operation of the doors and how these are used particularly if there are concerns around mis-use of the doors.

2. Improving Communication about Covid-19

- a) Request clear information from the council on what communications will be provided to residents about COVID regulations and restrictions over the coming months.
- b) Ask for a proposal on how to improve consultation with resident representatives on this and involve them in discussions on a) what the main problems are where they live and b) how to make any communication clearer and more accessible.

Response

Sam Warren – Community Engagement Manager

The Community Engagement Team will work with our colleagues in Housing to provide up to date information in our regular bulletin that we email to all the

Tenant groups and tenant reps. We do understand that this information is by email, so we rely on some of this being shared by the reps where they know that their neighbours do not have email. In order to get information to all residents we will ensure any up to date changes are put into Homing In as this is posted to all households. On occasion where there is urgent information or there are changes to government guidance, posters, flyers or letters to residents will be used. However as much of the information about COVID 19 is directly from the government we would also advice resident to keep themselves updated through the daily news.

If the tenant associations or representatives have more ideas about how to ensure we can get information out more widely then please talk to your Community Engagement officer about this. If you would like to sign up to receive the bulletin please email Fabrizio.Oliveri@brighton-hove.gov.uk

3. Major Problems with Windows and Roofs Contract

Request for investigation: It was agreed to ask for a full investigation to be carried out into the extent of these problems across the city, with a report to the next Area Panels indicating what steps are being taken.

Response

Glyn Huelin - Head of Housing – Repairs & Improvement

Thank you for setting out these concerns. We have investigated these points in detail and have prepared a response to each issue raised. Where appropriate we are undertaking further actions as a result and are following up with contractors as necessary.

We introduced a revised and robust process for issues that are identified after major works following feedback from residents that the previous processes weren't operating well. Residents now receive a job number for every fault identified and these are reviewed by council staff.

2 Stars - Central

4. Door Repairs at Essex Place

To go to Agenda setting with a request for a clear commitment on when this repair will be completed satisfactorily (if it hasn't already been resolved through communication between the Residents Association and the council). Emma Salcombe to continue to follow this up and to contact Gary Gurr (Leaseholders team) for a list of costings of repairs to leaseholders and Geoff Gage (Business and performance manager).

Response

Glyn Huelin - Head of Housing – Repairs & Improvement

Thank you for your question and we do understand the concerns of the residents. We have covered some similar points in another question on this in this paper.

We have investigated the repairs at Essex Place and all outstanding reported

repairs have been actioned and completed. We have identified that several of the call outs reported that on arrival by our contractors the problem reported is no longer evident and/or was not a fault of the door or door entry system. It does appear that unfortunately there are a number of these cases that are due to misuse or vandalism. Our supervisors are undertaking the first inspection on a call out to ascertain whether this is a repair issue or not prior to instructing contractors – this will not cause a delay to any repair that may be needed. We have now ordered the installation of an assisted openers to the doors which we hope will avoid misuse issues which may be as a result of the door being forced open.

We are happy to work with the Residents Association on these issues looking at both the operation of the doors and anti-social behaviour in the block and will arrange a meeting with the Residents Association and council officers.

Other Area 3 Star West

5. Area Panel Process:

Propose that a different process is discussed and agreed.

This could, for example, have a range of options:

- a) Response is satisfactory (if any actions have already been completed)
- b) Response is satisfactory pending implementation (with report to future Area Panel when action has been completed)
- c) Response is unsatisfactory (with information on why and what else is needed)

Response

Sam Warren – Community Engagement Manager

In order to provide more clarity in responses we have now set up a table of actions and responses to Area Panel which we will follow up at the beginning of each Area Panel. This will include previous responses that the residents would like to follow up on. We will also follow the suggestions of the residents and mark the responses in the minutes using the criteria above.

6. Upkeep of Estates and Maintenance of Green Areas

It was agreed to ask for a report to the next Area Panel which will include concrete proposals on how the Council intends to:

- Ensure proper management and resources so areas are properly maintained.

(Issues that need dealing with include fly-tipping; overgrown pathways, regular grass-cutting and pruning, general tidying up and maintenance).

- Use the local knowledge of residents to identify and resolve problems.
- Maintain and develop green spaces on the estates.

Response

Sam Warren – Community Engagement Manager

This is an ongoing issue and is regularly raised by residents about different overgrown areas in the city. As such the Community Engagement team will be setting up a task and finish group to explore the problems and how to find a more sustainable solution. We will be inviting residents, Housing and City Clean colleagues to join the group in January. The task and finish group will report back to Area Panel. If you interested in being part of the task and finish group please email Bethan.Hudson@brighton-hove.gov.uk

7. Review of Council Policy on anti-social behaviour

- a) It can take 9-12 months to resolve a problem.
- b) Living with the threat of violent or abusive behaviour from your neighbours has a huge impact on people. The stress caused is detrimental to both physical and mental health and the longer it goes on the worse this is.
- c) Violent and anti-social behaviour has an impact beyond the immediate victim and can destroy whole communities. This needs to be taken into account when considering what action to take.
- d) People's safety is paramount, and sometimes the aggressor needs to be removed from the situation to make sure other people are safe. This doesn't usually happen.
- e) Concerns about the council's policy and practise are growing as the amount of anti-social behaviour appears to be on the increase.

Request for a review of the present policy on anti-social behaviour, with full consultation and involvement of residents.

Response

Justine – Head of Tenancy Services

We recognise that ASB cases cause significant stress to individuals and communities and we work with other agencies, including the police, to tackle ASB and reduce the impact on individual residents and communities.

We'd be very happy to have further discussions with Tenant Reps on the processes we follow and why and also explain our internal processes, however the policy is kept under review to reflect changes to legislation. We need to make sure what we do is within the legal framework. The council's Legal team advise on the action we take and this has to be timely and compliant before a case can be presented to the court. We are reliant on witness statements.

.We have a victim-centred approach to dealing with ASB, where victims and witnesses are risk assessed, risk mitigation measures are put in place and the needs and wishes of victims are put at the centre of what we do on ASB cases. We provide a specific point of contact (SPOC) for vulnerable victims and witnesses and agree a regular pattern of contact to support and update them. We can provide additional security and make referrals to other agencies for additional support.

We have comprehensive and regularly reviewed ASB policies & procedures. We have a specialist Complex Cases Team dealing mainly with ASB and we have very experienced Housing Officers and Housing Managers across the city managing ASB cases.

Every case is different and the length of time it takes to resolve depends on the action being taken. The risk assessments that we carry out focus on the impact the behaviour is having on residents. When we prepare statements for court, we specifically address the impact on victims and witnesses and on the wider community.

The perpetrator will only usually be removed if we evict them, because otherwise we risk simply moving the problem to another neighbourhood. What we aim to do is to tackle the behaviour.

There are provisions in the Coronavirus Act 2020 which have had a significant impact on the enforcement action that we are able to take. The aim of the housing provisions in the Act are to prevent people becoming homeless during the pandemic. This means that it is extremely difficult to obtain a possession order at the moment and there are delays obtaining injunctions and Closure Orders.

North

8. Support for Elderly and Vulnerable Residents

Information is requested at Area Panel on:

1. what steps the council is taking to ensure that all residents who are in need or vulnerable are receiving the support they need
2. how Residents Associations can work with the council, by sharing information they have about local people who need support.

Response

Justine – Head of Tenancy Services

If you know of anyone needing help or support contact the Community Hub 01273 293117 or go online to the council website Request help for yourself or someone else (brighton-hove.gov.uk).

The Covid pages on the Council website are updated frequently and have lots of information, links to other websites, forms, advice, health, food partnership etc.

The council has sent out “postcards” and newsletters to every household in the city several times this year giving advice and information about services and how to access help/support. The most recent postcard has gone out last week and includes service information for Xmas/New Year.

Individual services such as social services, housing, carers hub etc have contacted the vulnerable residents known to them on a regular basis

Housing staff have phoned over 5000 council households to check in on them to see if they needed support.

Senior’s Housing staff are contacting their residents daily to check if they are ok and the Tenancy Sustainment team are in frequent contact with all their tenants; and the Welfare officers do weekly ring rounds of clients in emergency accommodation

All the clinically extremely vulnerable people or CEVS have been contacted several times to see if they need support.

As always - if residents are concerned about a tenant they can contact housing.customerservices@brighton-hove.gov.uk or phone 01273 293030. Please let us know the name and address of the person and reason for concern. Because of data protection, we can't discuss the details of case with you unless the person has given us permission for you to act on their behalf. However, we will always let you know that we have received your email/call and will be acting on it.

For safeguarding concerns (i.e concerns about abuse or self neglect) contact Front Door for Families for children or the Safeguarding Hub for Adults

How to report abuse or neglect

In an emergency, phone the police on 999.

Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm, phone the Access Point on 01273 29 55 55, or send an email to hascsafeguardinghub@brighton-hove.gov.uk. Outside these hours calls will be answered by CareLink Plus.

If you think a crime has taken place, but it's not an emergency, phone Sussex Police on 101.

You can remain anonymous when reporting abuse and neglect if you wish.

Email the team at FrontDoorforFamilies@brighton-hove.gov.uk. Telephone 01273 290400 during working hours (9am to 5pm, Monday to Thursday and 9.00am to 4.30pm on Fridays).

Outside of our working hours please contact the Emergency Duty Service on 01273 335 905 or 01273 335 906.

East

9. Draft Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy

Residents request that submission of the Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy to Housing Committee be postponed to ensure that residents can discuss its contents at their Association meetings and Service Improvement Groups.

Response

Sam Warren – Community Engagement Manager

The Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy has been discussed with

a range of tenant and leaseholder groups. It has been to the Involvement and Empowerment Group twice, to the Leaseholder Action Group and many of the original ideas were taken from resident proposals and papers. The draft Strategy also came to November Area Panel and the feedback from those meetings has been incorporated into the paper.

In order to decide if the report should be taken to January Housing Committee the principles and recommendations in the paper were discussed further on 9th December at the Involvement and Empowerment Group Service Improvement Group. There were mixed views at the group and some additional amendments will be added to the paper as a result.

However, it was widely agreed that the principles of defining three categories of engagement, Pro-active, Responsive and Structural were positive and this will allow us to expand the ways that tenants and leaseholders can share their views and influence council services. At the end of the meeting there was a vote to decide if the resident representatives agreed that the paper would go to Housing Committee in January, the results were 9 in favour, 1 against and 1 abstention.

To ensure the delivery of the Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy it was agreed that we will co-produce a timebound Action Plan. This will be added to the committee report as a key recommendation. The Involvement and Empowerment Service Improvement group will lead on the development of the Action Plan and work with a range of stakeholders in Housing and other council services to develop realistic plan that has buy in from the key partners. We aim to bring the Action Plan to Area Panel in April 2021

10. Estate Development Budget

Clarification is requested on the current guidelines, procedures and timelines for EDB. It is proposed that any unspent EDB money from 2020/21 be carried forward to 2021/22 and that funds remaining from each area be ring-fenced to be used in that area the following year.

Response

Sam Warren – Community Engagement Manager

Residents can still have appointments over the phone with their local Community Engagement Officer (CEO) or the EDB Assistant to discuss EDB generally, to receive information on how to make bids, and to find out

information on local community groups/associations which can offer further support in their application.

The process of submitting a Main bid has not changed in that any group must fill in the EDB Forms, stating the order of priority, and including evidence of consultation to the Community Engagement Team by the bid deadline. This will be the first financial year where we will implement the bi-annual bid rounds. This means that the annual EDB fund (last year this was £320,000) will be split into £160,000 in April 2021 and £160,000 in October 2021 to spend, minus £20,000 for quick bids for the annual year 2021-2022, allocated at the April 2021 meeting.

We anticipate that projects will be delivered closer to the decision point using this bi-annual method. In the past EDB underspends in one Area Panel area have been ring fenced to that area for use the following financial year, however there has been a significant reduction in EDB funding from its original amount of £500,000 to £320,000 in 2020/21. Over the years the reserve funds have been used to supplement the total amount, however these reserves were gradually depleted. In 2018/19 the EDB budget stood at £348,000, with £178,000 direct revenue funding and £170,000 from EDB reserves.

As of 2018, rather than being ringfenced to a particular area, any underspend was returned to the reserve pot, which was in turn used to supplement the EDB revenue funding for future years. Ring fencing underspends to one particular area would mean this wasn't possible and perpetuate an imbalance in funding where an area that struggled to spend its budget in one year would have more the next, while an area which had more bids than budget, would have less money the following year.

11. Leaseholder Charges Relating to Antisocial behaviour

When work to communal areas becomes necessary as a result of antisocial behaviour, is it always the policy of the Council to charge leaseholders for a proportion of the costs of the work?

Response

Glyn Huelin - Head of Housing – Repairs & Improvement

The leases set out that the costs of the council's repair and maintenance responsibility are passed on to leaseholders in accordance with the terms of the lease. The lease does not distinguish between the type of work. Some damage caused by anti-social behaviour can be claimed from our buildings

insurers and we do so wherever possible. Some damage caused this way is not covered and may be recovered through the repair charges. This can vary depending on the circumstances and if there is a case that residents would like us to review please could the details be provided to our leasehold team at rtbleasehold@brighton-hove.gov.uk and we can look into the matter further.

12. Leaseholder Charges

When work is done to convert a flat for disabled use, is at the policy of Brighton and Hove City Council to charge leaseholders in the block for a proportion of the cost?

Response

Glyn Huelin - Head of Housing – Repairs & Improvement

We would not charge for conversion works, jobs for such works would usually be raised to the relevant flat in our system and would not get picked up and included in the costs we pass on to leaseholders.

The leases set out that leaseholders pay for the repair and maintenance of communal areas but not works such as conversions or adaptations to individual flats.

