

October 2021

North
2 Stars

Hollingdean window replacements

Background

See Minutes of North Area Residents Only Meetings: Items 8 from 12th November 2020 and Item 3 from 15th June 2021

Issue:

Windows in many of the houses and flats in Hollingdean are in very poor condition and need to be replaced. The council has carried out a survey of windows in blocks in Hollingdean, but residents are not aware of the windows in houses being surveyed. A commitment has been made to start window replacements in 2022/23 but no detail has been provided on which properties will be done first or how many properties will be done each year.

Action

Residents are requesting:

- A survey of houses in Hollingdean to evaluate the condition of the existing windows.
- Details of window replacements that will be done in 2022/2

We have recently engaged our new planned works contractors A D Construction who will be undertaking the replacement programme for planned works of windows.

The team have been working on our programmes and due to the delay in setting up this contract we have had to concentrate efforts and this year programmes on blocks which were in the most urgent need.

However, there is good news and the forthcoming years programmes will include individual houses.

In 2022/23 we have the street properties in the following areas provisionally included:

Mountfields

Fountains Close

Hinton Close

Romsey Close

Melrose Close

The Crossway

I have to stress that at this time these are provisionally in the programme, this is always subject to change should other properties be identified that take more priority or we see other delays which might impact the programme delivery.

Response

Geof Gage

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I hope that this information will be of help and assistance.response

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Condition of kitchen at 8 Dunster Close

Background

The kitchen of 8 Dunster Close has only been renewed once (in 1985) since the house was built in 1952. It is now in very poor condition and needs to be renewed. The tenant has contacted repairs about it on several occasions, but they have carried out minor repairs instead of resolving the problem. Residents wish to know how long kitchens are expected to last, what are the council's plans for raising the standards of kitchens coming to the end of their useful life.

Action

Residents are requesting information on how the council has identified homes needing these works. Is the standard provided by the council comparable to what private tenants can expect? Are regular surveys or checks carried out, if so how often and what are they looking for?

Also please provide:

- An update on the Decent Homes Standard (If it is no longer being used, has anything replaced it?) and what residents can expect in the future on this
- Information on the council's plans to maintain buildings built during this period
- Information on how long new kitchens are expected to last
- Information on the policy on matching existing kitchen builds with replacement equipment, residents don't want their homes to look haphazard

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Response

Christopher McNiven

The Decent Homes Standard states that a new Kitchen should last 30 years and a Bathroom 40 years.

Between 2010 and 2020 Mears were contracted to carry out an expansive survey programme of all council stock and give an update on the condition of the kitchens and bathrooms of these properties. From the results of these surveys a programme of planned works was drawn up prioritising the oldest and those which were in the poorest condition in need of urgent upgrading. The Decent Home survey looked at the age of the kitchens and bathrooms as well as condition, focussing on things like number of sockets, number of units and any health and safety concerns of the cooker. Using a scoring system, surveyors were asked to estimate how long the kitchen would last, although even if a kitchen was in good condition, it could still fail decency based on age alone.

The council has now been working through this list in the priority identified, there are currently over 300 properties which have not met the Decent Homes Standard and are due to receive installations of new kitchens and bathrooms. Unfortunately, due to the unavoidable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic this work is behind schedule although the Repairs Team are restarting this work and ensuring residents homes are safe to use.

If any repairs are identified, a surveyor will attend and inspect. If it's repairable they will do so, if not, health and safety issues will be addressed and the property will be prioritised on the list to be done within the next year. 8 Dunster Close, along with other properties in that area, was surveyed by Mears in 2012 and is due to fail Decency based on age in 2022. This property will be added to the programme for a new Kitchen to be installed next year.

With regards to matching Kitchen units in the future during a repair, we cannot guarantee that every unit colour and range will be held in stock by Benchmark, Howdens or Magnets Kitchens, but we would endeavour to match as close as possible to the item that is being replaced in the future. If a kitchen and bathroom fail Decency, the units will be replaced as a whole and residents are offered a choice of types of worktops, flooring colours, paint colours and internal doors.

North 2 Stars

Security lighting at Tavistock Down

Background

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There are a total of 24 security lights on the blocks in Tavistock Down and only two are currently working. The blocks are set back from the road, so this leaves them in almost complete darkness at night.

This has been reported to the repairs department by the Residents Association three times, but the lights still haven't been fixed.

Action

Residents are requesting that all the security lights on Tavistock Down be repaired urgently

Response

Grant Richie

Thank you for bringing this to our attention. We have inspected the site, ordered materials, we expect the replacements to be complete by the middle of October.

North 2 Stars

Storage areas to the flats in Tavistock Down and The Crestway

Background

Some time ago the old bin stores were converted into storage areas for the use of residents. The structures are now in very bad condition, with a lot of the concrete crumbling. Residents are concerned that one of them could collapse and cause serious damage to somebody.

This has been reported to the council previously, but no action has been taken

Action

Residents are requesting that the concrete storage areas be inspected and essential repairs be carried out.

Response

Grant Richie

The storage areas had been inspected in November 2021 and a carpentry job booked to replace

North 3 Stars

Tackling anti-social behaviour in high rise blocks

Background

Issue:

The council's current procedures for tackling anti-social behaviour are not effective for either the perpetrators (who often need a higher level of support) or the victims (who have to live with very stressful situations for years).

Background:

In Nettleton Court and Duneney Lodge there are six long-standing problems with anti-social behaviour which the Council has been unable to resolve.

The RA has held a meeting with local councillors, a member of the anti-social behaviour team and a resident who has been suffering from their neighbour's noise nuisance for 4.5 year. The council has agreed to have a 'single point of contact' so everyone knows who to contact when there are problems. Residents are also planning to make a deputation to the Housing Committee on 22nd September 2021.

The meeting agreed that the council's over-reliance on collecting evidence, asking residents to keep diaries, and using a legal process is not solving the problem. Many of those who are causing problems for their neighbours are experiencing their own difficulties with poor mental health, dependency on drug or alcohol, etc. This is exacerbated by the construction of the flats which allows noise to travel between the flats very easily.

Action

Residents feel that the problem needs to be looked at more broadly:

- More supported housing is needed, which offers intensive support so people can maintain their tenancies and not become homeless.
- More intensive support is needed for those given tenancies with the council or Seaside Homes, especially those who are known to be vulnerable, have a dependency on drugs or alcohol, or have poor mental health.
- Allocations should take into account the needs of the new tenant and the needs of existing tenants they will be living next to.
- Moving the victim doesn't solve the underlying problem and is not fair to tenants who want to stay where they are.
- These issues should be considered as part of the Anti-Social Behaviour Review and the Allocations Review.

Response

Justine Harris

Thank you for highlighting these concerns, these will be considered at part of the Anti-Social Behaviour Review, we are very keen to improve how we respond proactively to reports of anti-social behaviour. These concerns were also responded at Housing Committee on 22nd September Link to Housing Committee . The impact of Anti-social behaviour on our residents is taken very seriously.

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We are seeking to further enhance tenancy support, including consideration of provision of support to our most vulnerable tenants. Part of this is reviewing how we better support residents who are moving from temporary accommodation into settled accommodation. We want to ensure that perpetrators of anti-social behaviour receive the support they need to sustain their tenancy without their behaviour impacting on others. We have increased provision of Housing First and Housing Led support accommodation for clients with multiple and complex needs. All cases of anti-social behaviour that have not been resolved at Nettleton and Dudeney have been referred to Housing's Complex Case team to review, to explore remedial options available.

I hope this information is useful and the residents can continue to work with officers to respond to the issues arising and to participate in our antisocial behaviour policy review.

Central 3 Stars

Future of gas central heating in council housing

Background

Prompted by the theme of the Citywide Conference, residents would like more information about the council's planned response to the government's decision to move away from gas heating

- The contracts for new heating systems in council housing are currently under discussion.
- The government has indicated that it will not be legal to install new gas boilers after a certain date.
- Heat pumps are being suggested as an alternative, but it is difficult for residents to get clear information about the total lifetime carbon impact of these.

Action

A report is requested on the Council's plans for moving away from gas central heating. When does the council intend to stop replacing gas boilers with new gas boilers, and what alternative heating methods are planned?

{Central AP Agenda Setting meeting request Miles Davidson attends Central AP to speak in person about this. HLT to confirm back to CE Team for Agenda.}

Response

Miles Davidson

A report on the Council's plans to retrofit it's own housing stock including the decarbonisation of heat to contribute to the ambition to be Carbon Neutral by 2030 will be presented to Housing Committee in the coming months. We are currently scoping out a new contract for servicing, maintenance, repair and installation of

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heating and hot water services to replace the current contract when it expires at the end of March 2023, a report seeking approval to procure will be going to housing Committee in January and will be shared with AP's at the appropriate time. There have been indications that new gas boilers will be banned sometime in the 2030's but this has not yet been confirmed or a date given. Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHPs) will be a significant option to retrofit in our own housing in place of gas boilers but will not be suitable for every setting, so we will be looking at a range of zero/low carbon technologies. New technologies are being introduced to the market regularly and we want to ensure we invest in the right technologies that meet the needs of residents. We can provide more detail on ASHPs as required, and will be keen to engage with residents including through AP's and Home Group on these issues.

East 3 Stars

Cityclean service, sanitation and covid

Background

Cityclean is still failing to provide a full service and has repeatedly said this is due to staff absence due to covid. This is leading to poor sanitation throughout the city with bins overflowing, creating a haven for rats and flies which represent a health hazard to the population of the city.

Research has shown a clear connection between sanitation levels and the spread of covid. As Brighton and Hove has a high prevalence of covid, it is therefore urgent that the city council improve the collection of refuse to rectify poor sanitation levels in the city.

Action

It was agreed to raise this at the Agenda Setting meeting and request a report on:

- What weight has been given to improving the refuse and recycling services as part of Brighton and Hove's strategy to reduce covid cases
- What action the council is taking to improve the performance of CityClean

Response

Melissa Francis

The City Environment Modernisation Programme is developing a sustainable future for the service in Brighton & Hove in the context of reducing council budgets, increasing customer demand and potential future legislative changes. As part of the programme, a number of improvement projects are underway and updates on these are regularly provided at the Environment, Transport and Sustainability Committee.

The improvement projects include:

Bin Infrastructure Action Plan - implementing a new approach to managing litter and street cleansing

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Communal bin system - Reviewing the existing communal bin system and identifying areas for improvement which includes, distribution of bins, capacity offered for different waste streams, improvements to glass recycling (bins, contamination of, and noise), bin bays, signage, type of bins, expansion of waste streams, and application of colour coding for the different waste streams

Digital Cityclean - Modernising the service and supporting the wider programme of change through technology

Fleet replacement - Delivering of a 10-year strategy and green procurement plan, providing cost and savings projections. The strategy includes the migration to new technology as it develops, such as hydrogen fuel cells, to reduce maintenance and carbon emissions

Managing waste responsibly - Delivering an informative and educational campaign to assist residents, visitors, businesses and crews to dispose of waste responsibly

Wheelie bin audit and rollout - Implementing a wheelie bin recycling service to all the streets identified as suitable for this service from the city-wide wheelie bin audit
A full list of the projects and current progress can be found in the modernisation update report presented to committee on 21 September 2021.

East

3 Stars

Graffiti on estates

Background

Residents have noticed that there is a significant increase in graffiti. In Craven Vale this is mainly on sheds and bus stops. Graffiti is recognised as a 'signal crime' that has the potential to lead to an increase in other crimes in an area. It is therefore important to prevent it and ensure it is cleaned off quickly when it does occur.

Action

It was agreed to raise this at the Agenda Setting meeting and request information on the council's procedures for removing graffiti.

Response

Melissa Francis

The council will remove offensive graffiti from all types of property, and aim to do this within 24 hours of it occurring, however for other types of graffiti we are only able to remove where it is on publicly owned property. With regards to the sheds responsibility to remove the graffiti will fall to the owner or leaseholder. It is possible to write to those responsible reminding them of these obligations. For the bus stops, these belong to Brighton and Hove Buses. I would be more than happy to write to our relevant contacts to make them aware of the graffiti in Craven Vale and ask them to remedy this. Looking forward we are in the process of introducing

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Community Protection Notices for graffiti which give us greater enforcement powers in these types of situations where reasonable requests to remove have been ignored. These will ensure that property owners are required to take greater responsibility or face legal action for not doing so.

East & West

3 Stars

Estate Development Budget (EDB) Task and Finish Group

Background

West

The Estate Development Budget (EDB) process has changed beyond recognition. It was originally established as a resident-led fund, but is now led by officers and encourages top-down solutions. It has become more complex, less flexible, and less useful as a vehicle for residents to improve their living environment.

Since this was raised at the West meeting on 22nd June 2021 the city-wide EDB Task and Finish Group has been opened up to more residents. It has become clear that residents throughout the city are dissatisfied with the process.

The meeting discussed three specific issues:

1. A new scoring system has been proposed by officers, with the scoring carried out by Community Engagement Officers. This takes control of the process away from residents.
2. Quick bids are no longer quick. The panel only meets every two months and bids have to be submitted a month in advance. If there is a query they have to be re-presented at the next meeting. As a result, it can be several months before they are agreed.
3. The CEO's written response to the Area Panel on 17th August stated: "An internal audit carried out in 2018, identified that there was only partial confidence in the EDB process and improvements needed to be made to make it fairer and more inclusive."

Residents would like to query the validity of this audit for the following reasons:

- An audit had already been carried out in 2017/18 which residents haven't been able to see.
- There is a lack of transparency on how the audit (completed in February 2018) was set up, how the officers were selected to carry it out and how the specification was drafted.
- Residents have been told that the audit showed the process to be unfair, but have not been shown the evidence for this.
- Five example bids were used for the audit. They were all problematic bids, and possibly not typical or representative of bids overall. Information hasn't been provided on how these examples were selected.

East

The EDB Task and Finish group has not been set up in a way that will enable any significant improvements in the EDB process.

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- Four of the residents present had attended the EDB Task and Finish group. The meeting was two hours long and the first half was spent on matters arising, repeating the discussions that had happened at the last meeting.
- Attendees were not all given an equal opportunity to speak – one attendee was allowed to speak at length about past decisions without being stopped whilst everyone else waited to be given the opportunity to discuss new procedures.
- The meeting didn't keep to the agenda or complete it.
- There was insufficient time to have clear and focussed discussions to move the process forward.
- There weren't any council officers present who are in a position to address residents' substantial concerns and make proposals that would facilitate any significant changes to the EDB process.

There is a lot of inconsistency on what work gets done and how quickly it is done. Some work agreed this year has already been done, but other work agreed in previous years is still outstanding. Work that was originally done to a poor standard is not being put right.

- A new path in Craven Vale that was agreed 18 months ago has still not been done and residents have not been given any information about when the work will start.
- The planters at Robert Lodge are so crooked that they can't be used. Council officers have agreed to get this resolved but it hasn't happened.
- Planters for Bristol Estate, which were agreed this year, have already been installed.
- It isn't clear what order work is being done in or how decisions are made to delay some work and prioritise other work.

Action

Residents are requesting:

1. A report on the audit completed in February 2018, to include:
 - How the specification was drafted and personnel selected
 - How the example bids were selected
 - What evidence was found that the process is unfair and not inclusive
2. Changes to the process for Quick bids so they are simpler, quicker and easier to use for residents
3. A change to the proposed scoring system so that it is led by residents

East request the following:

That the EDB Task and Finish group be attended by council officers who are able to respond to residents' concerns and formulate them into proposals for significant improvements to the process.

That meetings be chaired effectively, to ensure the agenda is kept to and there is space for all to contribute equally.

- A list of all outstanding EDB projects, with details of when they will be completed
- A report on how different EDB projects are prioritised

Response

Keely McDonald

A report about the EDB audit report will be provided to the EDB task and finish group by the end of the calendar year. Officers to commit to a further discussion with the task and finish group about the feedback on the quick bids process and

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the scoring system. Feedback about the EDB task and finish group is noted; officers will reflect on officer attendance and chairing and ensure officers are able to facilitate the group reaching a solution. All members of the group will be reminded of ground rules for the meeting. A list of approved EDB projects is provided at each meeting and will continue. A report on how different EDB projects are taken forward will be provided to the task and finish group by the end of the year.

East & West 3 Stars

Grounds maintenance service

Background

The condition of estates is still deteriorating. Weeds are growing across paths, in front of entrance doors and through the cracks in pavements. This is a hazard for residents and is causing damage to paved areas which will cost money to repair. When City Parks come to do the grounds maintenance, they cut the grass but do not get rid of the weeds in the paths.

Examples were given from Conway Court and Clarke Court, where elderly and disabled residents are having to go out and clear the weeds themselves because the work isn't being done by the council.

Officers inspect the area and mark up damaged areas of the pavement that need to be repaired with white paint, but the repairs then don't get done.

The increasing weeds, overgrown shrubs and uncut grass are becoming a hazard for residents. The council's decision to stop the use of glyphosates has not been matched with an increase in staffing levels to ensure the city is kept tidy and safe. Residents felt that the council should investigate the option of using alternative, safe herbicides to address this problem.

Action

Residents are requesting information on how the council plan to cut back shrubs, clear the weeds on paths and cut the grassed areas to an acceptable standard.

Response

Justine Harris

Thank you for your question. CityParks used to spray in some hard surface areas within Housing estates but since ceasing use of Glyphosate weed killer are unable to help maintain areas prone to weeds. Managing weeds is challenging without the use of pesticides, other options have been explored.

As residents have pointed out, failure to manage them effectively can lead to damage on pavements and roads and weeds can become obstructions and/or trip hazards.

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Housing has a hard surfaces team consisting of two members of staff. This is not enough to maintain Housing land. We are now exploring use of a contractor, who is able to weed without use of chemical pesticides. The hard surfaces team have been asked to attend Clarke Court and Conway Court to clear the weeds.

Generally land on estates is Housing's responsibility to maintain. CityParks mow the grass and cut back shrubs. The growth has been unusually rapid during this summer and they are still catching up, we are prioritising hedge pruning in areas where access is prevented. Hard pruning is carried out through Autumn & Winter. The level of service has also been below standard due to staffing issues.

West

3 Stars

Maintenance Schedule

Background

This issue arose in response to requests to the EDB for funds to carry out work that should be done as part of the regular maintenance schedule.

The council's written response to the Area Panel in May stated: "The council does not work to a fixed pattern of carrying out certain work to its properties every 'X' amount of years, instead the council prioritises work as and when it is required."

In the past residents have been informed that there is a schedule, in that specific types of work will be carried out in a cycle of every 5, 10, 15 or 20 years – depending on the nature of the work. This has led residents to submit EDB bids in the belief that work such as internal decoration of blocks cannot be done until they are due according to the schedule. If the schedule is flexible and based on inspections of blocks, then it should be possible for work to be brought forward if it is deemed to be necessary.

Action

Residents are requesting information about how often the council plans to carry out maintenance to blocks, such as internal decoration, external decoration, replacement of windows and doors.

{Central AP Agenda Setting meeting request Geof Gage or Martin Reid attends Central AP to speak in person about this.}

Response

Geof Gage

We have planned works programme that is based on information that we receive from stock condition surveys carried out by and on behalf of the Council. These identify areas of work that we need to address on a 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30 year cycle.

We do not operate our programmes on a 'cyclical' programme due to budget constraints and resources we are unable to do so.

We prepare our works on an urgent requirement and assess the needs on this basis.

The planned

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programme for external and internal decorations and repairs covers both repairs and decorations and it is often the case that there are essential external repairs to be carried out.

It is not possible to bring work forward to suit an EDB suggestion for example as our programmes are established in advance and there is often little scope for 'ad-hoc requests.

What we are able to do in the case of an EDN+B request is to advise as to when a particular block is anticipated to be on the programme, this would be on a within 5, 10, 15 year cycle and then consideration can be given as to whether this is suitable for EDB funding from that source.

West

3 Stars

Impact of residents vaping in blocks of flats

Background

Residents are concerned about the impact on other residents if people are vaping in their flats or in communal areas of blocks. There has been some research evidence that vaping can be harmful to people's lungs and hearts.

Given this risk, residents would like to know what policies the council has developed to ensure all residents are protected from the potential harmful effects of people vaping in proximity to their homes.

Action

Residents are requesting information on what policies the council has developed to ensure all residents are protected from the potential harmful effects of people vaping in proximity to their homes.

Response

Justine Harris

The NHS website advises :

“There's no evidence so far that vaping causes harm to other people around you.

This is in contrast to second hand smoke from smoking, which is known to be very harmful to health.” As a landlord we do not control whether someone can smoke or vape in their own home. More information can be found on

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/using-e-cigarettes-to-stop-smoking/>

West 3 Stars

Repairs to empty properties

Background

Some empty properties are being let to new tenants when the properties aren't in a fit state.

Repairs staff are leaving rubbish and debris in communal areas.

A new tenant in Clarke Court was signed up for a flat even though it wasn't possible to open the front door. A repair was ordered, but the operative looked at the backdoor and reported that it was OK, so the repair didn't get done.

There have also been problems with repair staff leaving the communal areas and lifts in Clarke Court very dirty with debris lying around.

Action

Residents would like to know what procedures are in place for void properties to be inspected to ensure they are fit for the new tenant.

{Central AP Agenda Setting meeting request Grant Richie attends Central AP to speak in person about this.}

Response

Grant Richie

All properties are post inspected by BHCC Supervisors to ensure they meet the Technical Lettable standard. We have checked our records and cannot find a job to attend to the locks at the 3 properties that have been through the empty homes process at Clarke Court over the past 18 months. The flat entrance door locks are changed upon completion of the Empty Homes works by the Estates Services team, it is possible that this report went directly to Estates but we would need the specific address to look into this matter further. Since transfer to BHCC the Empty Homes team have started utilising two new contractors, we have received a complaint of materials/debris being left in communal areas by one of these contractors, this was addressed at the time and we have not received any further complains or picked up any issues about site cleanliness when carrying out spot inspections. Any concerns should be raised at the time by calling the repairs helpdesk.