

East, West, North, Central Area 3 Stars

Repairs backlog

Background

West: there is an overall deterioration of the repairs and maintenance service. This does not seem to be improving, despite assurances from the Council that new staff are being employed. It was acknowledged that COVID has been a difficulty but felt that this wasn't the only problem with the delivery of the service.

For example, there is differing information on the definition of emergency repairs. There can also be different interpretations between the Council and residents about whether a repair is an emergency or not.

North: Residents have been told that it will take 12 months to clear the repairs backlog (written response to Area Panels December 2021). This is extremely frustrating for all the tenants who are waiting for their repairs to be done.

East: Windows that are faulty and beyond repair are not being replaced. Residents are being told that they have to wait until this work is scheduled for their block under the planned maintenance programme. At the same time, many windows are being replaced under the planned maintenance programme that are perfectly good and do not need replacing.

Associations are receiving a lot of complaints from residents who have windows which do not keep the heat in, are draughty and let in rain. There is widespread concern about this because:

- It adversely affects the health of residents who are living for long periods of time with faulty windows
- People are paying higher heating bills because so much of the heat is escaping through the faulty windows
- Water coming in through windows can lead to further damage to the fabric of the building and more costly repairs in the long term
- This is hampering the council's plans to reduce carbon emissions as discussed at Housing Committee on 17th November 2021
- This is counter to the promises about the Decent Homes Initiatives made in BHCC 'Our plan 2020 to 2023'

Craven Vale Community Association (CVCA) and Bristol Estate Leaseholders, Tenants and Residents Association (BELTA) have both been trying to address this problem.

BELTA have been supporting residents who have reported faulty windows, by logging the deadline by which work should be done and chasing it up if it isn't done.

Central Area Panel Residents Questions

February 2022

This has been successful in some cases. BELTA has also found that replacing windows in high rise blocks is less of an obstacle than they thought, as this can often be done from inside a flat rather than requiring scaffolding.

Following a discussion at Craven Vale Community Association some residents chose to write to Cllr Nancy Platts. Cllr Platts followed this up but received an unsatisfactory response from officers stating that the residents concerned will have to wait years for windows to be replaced, as Craven Vale window replacements are being done at a rate of two blocks a year. Cllr Platts has suggested this matter could be brought to the Area Panel or Housing Committee if it is found to be a common problem experienced by many residents and the Residents Association is going to follow this up.

Central: Concerns around Sylvan Hall and safety of it because the windows do fall out. Martin Reid has undertaken a survey on feasibility of replace or repair in Sylvan Hall.

Action

West: Residents are requesting information on:

- a) What does an emergency repair consist of?
- b) What are the timescales for emergency repairs? Is there a difference between the Council's stated timescales and what is actually happening now?

North: Residents are requesting a report on the progress being made by the repairs service to clear the backlog.

East: It was agreed to raise this at the Agenda Setting meeting.

Residents are requesting a review of the way windows are assessed for repair or replacement which specifically addresses the following issues:

- Ensuring that windows which are beyond repair are treated the same as all other routine repairs and replaced within 20 days
- Assessing windows prior to replacement under the planned maintenance programme to ensure the work is necessary
- Taking into account the impact on resident's health and fuel bills when there are potential delays to window repairs or replacements

Residents would like a report of this review to be brought back to Area Panels for discussion.

Central: response/update from Martin Reid on the survey on feasibility of replace or repair in Sylvan Hall.

Response

*Theresa Youngman - Contract Compliance Manager-
theresa.youngman@brighton-hove.gov.uk / Grant Richie - Head of Repairs and
Maintenance - grant.richie@brighton-hove.gov.uk*

West: We are very sorry to hear that there is a general feeling of deterioration of the repairs and maintenance service. Since insourcing into the council in April 2020 the pandemic restrictions have posed (and continue to pose) enormous challenges on

Central Area Panel Residents Questions

February 2022

our service. Unfortunately, a large backlog of works has unavoidably accumulated during this time, which has led to long delays to non-urgent works. We appreciate how frustrating this is for our residents and we are working hard to schedule works according to priority need.

To help us reduce the backlog of works, we are recruiting additional staff, but this is not a quick fix. Recruitment of suitably trained / experienced staff and getting new staff up to speed does take time. We anticipate that normal service delivery will take approximately one year.

The definition of what constitutes an emergency repair is defined by the Government's Right To Repair legislation. All local authorities are required to attend within 1 day (24 hours) of an emergency priority repair being reported. Please see in the appendix the Government's list of emergency priority repairs. I hope this clarifies.

North: Residents are requesting a report on the progress being made by the repairs service to clear the backlog.

Response: To help us reduce the backlog of works, we are recruiting additional staff but this is not a quick fix. Recruitment of suitably trained / experienced staff and getting new staff up to speed does take time. We anticipate that normal service delivery will take approximately one year. We appreciate this is incredibly frustrating for residents and we are working hard to schedule outstanding repairs according to priority need.

East: It was agreed to raise this at the Agenda Setting meeting.

Residents are requesting a review of the way windows are assessed for repair or replacement which specifically addresses the following issues:

- Ensuring that windows which are beyond repair are treated the same as all other routine repairs and replaced within 20 days
- Assessing windows prior to replacement under the planned maintenance programme to ensure the work is necessary
- Taking into account the impact on resident's health and fuel bills when there are potential delays to window repairs or replacements

Residents would like a report of this review to be brought back to Area Panels for discussion.

Response: We have commenced the city wide Planned Window Programme this year, and the areas / blocks being programmed are prioritised by those most in need of work. We are due to start on the Craven Vale Estate next year and have programmed in 2 blocks to start (the remainder will be phased over coming years). A further verbal update will be given at the East Area Panel meeting.

Central: response/update from Martin Reid on the survey on feasibility of replace or repair in Sylvan Hall.

Response: Works will be commencing at Sylvan Hall next year; residents will be updated by letter before this starts.

West Area 3 Stars

Argus Article on changes to Estate Development Budget

Background

The Argus printed an article on 14th December about the changes to the Estate Development Budget (EDB). This was before the EDB paper had been discussed at Area Panel and it was felt that it pre-empted residents' decisions. Not everyone at the meeting had seen the article, and the joint chairs agreed to follow up on this issue and if necessary put in a formal complaint.

Action

West residents asked if housing had sent a press release to the Argus which instigated the article 14/12/21 on the Estate Development Budget. If so, they asked to see a copy.

Response

Sam Warren - community engagement manager - sam.warren@brighton-hove.gov.uk

The Argus printed an article on 14th December about the changes to the Estate Development Budget (EDB). This was before the EDB paper had been discussed at Area Panel and it was felt that it pre-empted residents' decisions.

Not everyone at the meeting had seen the article, and the joint chairs agreed to follow up on this

The article in the Argus was written by journalist Sarah Booker Lewis who attends most of the Area Panel meetings and receives or accesses the papers from the public website. My understanding is that Sarah picked up the information from the report about Estates Development Budget in the public papers. The article was then based on this information. I'm very sorry but the residents saw this article before being aware that the papers had been made public on the council website.

In addition, I understand from talking to specific residents, that they were unhappy with content of the original report that the article was then based on. In this case I would request but these issues are taken to the Estates Development Budget task and finish group where they can be discussed and reviewed in more detail.

West Area 3 Stars

Area Panel Review and time for consultation

Background

An Area Panel Review was referred to in the responses given at the last West Area Panel. West Residents had not been aware this was going to take place and want to ensure that there is meaningful consultation with residents before any decisions are made.

West residents feel there is a history of proposals being taken to Housing Committee before disagreements and objections have been resolved and without meaningful consultation. Ways need to be found to improve on this.

An important step would be earlier distribution of papers. Area Panel papers are only available a week before the meeting. For many residents this will be the first time they see the proposals. Often these are detailed and lengthy and a week is insufficient time to read, consult members and draw together a response.

Action

West residents are asking that papers be published several weeks before Area Panels when they address major issues. Two current examples are the draft terms of reference for the new 'People' and 'Buildings' groups and the Area Panel review.

Response

Sam Warren - community engagement manager - sam.warren@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the energy and effort it takes for the residents to read and digest all the papers and recognise that sometimes there is a lot of information and we want residents to feel their involvement is valued and has impact.

If there are large documents that have significant impact, we will try to ensure that these come to Area Panel in a timely manner. When something is going to Housing Committee, this is especially important, and officers have been asked to (where possible) bring these papers to Area Panels with time for comments to be taken on board and possible changes to be made. In addition, at the agenda setting meetings we would ask the resident Vice Chair to raise any items they would like to come forward onto the agenda.

Central Area Panel Residents Questions

February 2022

It is also a suggestion to have an annual plan for key priorities, so these can be scheduled in ahead of Housing Committee to ensure residents and officers can have a timescale to bring items to each AP.

In terms of managing the meetings the timescales for the Area Panels are very tight. I have attached the timetable so residents can see the process and hope that is helpful.

In relation to the Area Panel Review there is a timetable and scoping document attached with Feb 2022 Area Panel Papers that sets out the review process. There will be detailed and timely consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including AP's, Tenants and leaseholder associations and individual tenants and residents.

North Area

3 Stars

Buying back council homes

Background

The council has the power to buy back properties that have previously been sold under the Right to Buy Scheme, as described in the Home Purchase Policy Guide. Residents are concerned about the lack of affordable housing available in the city and the length of time people have to wait before being housed. With this in mind, there is concern that the council may not be actively pursuing all its options to buy back homes.

Action

Residents are requesting a report on what action is taken by the council to identify homes that they could potentially buy back, and whether all the funds allocated for this are being used. Also, could the residents have the data in how many homes are being bought back broken down into the four areas of the city? Including the data on Hollingdean and Colddean.

Response

Diane Hughes -Housing Strategy & Enabling Manager - diane.hughes@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Thank you for your question regarding the council's 'buy back' scheme where the council seeks to buy back former council owned homes.

As at 24 January 2022 this scheme has allowed the council to buy back 194 properties with offers currently accepted on a further 40 properties. We have purchases committed against the budget set for this year and we aim to fully use the budget each year.

The council has a range of ways to identify properties for the scheme.

- Some owners are legally required to offer the council the right of first refusal if the Right to Buy has been exercised within the last 10 years. These owners need to approach the council directly
- Including information on the council's website [Sell your property back to the council \(brighton-hove.gov.uk\)](http://brighton-hove.gov.uk) and through Homing in which results in direct approaches to the council to sell back a property
- Review properties for sale on platforms such as Rightmove and Zoopla and once ex council properties are identified direct approaches are made to estate agents to explore a potential purchase.

Central Area Panel Residents Questions

February 2022

We will keep our publicity options under review and if necessary will expand publicity in order to meet our annual targets.

The breakdown across the four Area Panel areas is:

East: 43

Central: 67

West: 79

North: 45 (of which 22 are in the Hollingdean & Stanmer ward).

East and North Area

3 Stars

Citywide problems with rubbish and recycling

Background

The problems with rubbish and recycling collections across the city have not been resolved.

Examples were given from:

- Bristol Estate - see item 9
- Whitehawk - recycling wasn't collected for 6 weeks in one area
- Robert Lodge – recycling wasn't collected for a month and the bins smell so much that it affects residents when they are in their flats.
- Old Boat Walk – regular missed collections.
- Buttercup Walk Patcham - missed collections
- Dunster Close – miscollections.
- Wigmore Close – miscollections.

Action

It was agreed to raise this at the Agenda Setting meeting. Residents are requesting a review of the provision of bins throughout the city and the frequency of collections. This should include a plan of which bin areas should be de-odorized and how often. It is requested that Rachel Chasseaud attend the Area Panel to respond directly to residents' concerns.

Response

Melissa Francis - Head of Operations - Cityclean • City Environment (Cityclean & Cityparks) - Melissa.Francis@brighton-hove.gov.uk

- Bristol Estate - see item 9

This was first raised August/September time whether we could increase collecting until the bin stores were built. Unfortunately we did not have the resources to provide more frequent collections. This was at a time when we had driver shortages and on average 4 rounds not going out each day, and we couldn't commit resources when we were struggling to cover the normal service. We will review again whether it is possible to temporarily increase collections but we will need to consider capacity within the refuse and recycling collections service to take on this work.

Central Area Panel Residents Questions

February 2022

- Whitehawk - recycling wasn't collected for 6 weeks in one area

We have worked with the Driver and crew on service improvements in to recycling within Whitehawk including a recent audit. The results of the audit will be implemented which will lead to further improvement. Hopefully residents are starting to see more regular recycling collections but please do notify Cityclean of any issues.

- Robert Lodge – recycling wasn't collected for a month and the bins smell so much that it affects residents when they are in their flats.

- Old Boat Walk – regular missed collections.

- Buttercup Walk Patcham - missed collections

We will undertake a review of these locations and report to the next Area Panel Meeting

- Dunster Close – miscollections.

- Wigmore Close – miscollections.

Dunster Close and Wigmore Close are on the small calls round which has struggled due to additional work being put on this round. We have acquired an additional vehicle and resources to supplement the small calls round and this will increase reliability of collections where a small vehicle is required.

