

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING MANAGEMENT PANEL: CENTRAL AREA

2.00pm 16 AUGUST 2022 HYBRID MEETING

MINUTES

Present:

Councillors: Councillors Hugh-Jones (Chair), Shanks

Representatives: Carl Boardman (Warwick Mount Residents Association), Theresa Mackey (Highcroft Lodge Residents Association), David Spafford (Seaside Homes Community Association), Jason Williams (Churchill Gardens Residents Association)

Officers: Sam Warren (Community Engagement Manager), Simon Bannister (Community Engagement Officer), Janet Dowdall (Tenancy Services Operations Manager, Justine Harris (Head of Tenancy Services), Hannah Barker (Community Engagement Officer), Geoffrey Gage (Head of Housing Investment & Asset Management), Grant Ritchie (Head of Housing Repairs & Maintenance), Millie Wallace (Community Engagement Administrator) and Lisa Johnson (Democratic Services Manager)

1 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

1.1 There were no apologies.

The Chair was sad to announce the passing of Barry Hughes who was Chairman of the Sylvan Hall Residents' Association.

The Chair said:

I was a novice councillor, and he was an enormously experienced tenant representative, but Barry and I quickly established a rapport. Of course, it helped that we were both proudly Welsh! On my side, that initial rapport developed into enormous respect. Barry was an eloquent and determined advocate for tenants, particularly those of his beloved Sylvan Hall. He was also very balanced in his judgement and appreciative of any improvements. But beyond that, he was a man who enjoyed life and was good company to those he encountered along the way. His death came as such a shock. He will be much missed by us all.

I always enjoyed working with Barry. He took his responsibilities as a resident rep seriously - trying to find immediate solutions to problems, but also looking at the bigger picture, challenging us on policies and procedures where he thought these could be made simpler and fairer for residents. The last time I saw him was at the Brunswick festival a few years ago where he was working on a historical society stall. He brought the same interest and enthusiasm to that subject as he did to housing matters. He will be missed.

Barry Hughes was one of the most passionate and skilled resident leaders I had the pleasure to work with. He was a skilful communicator, clearly standing up for residents' views with a lovely balance of a warmth and humour. His years working in the city representing residents gave him such a wealth of knowledge. He will be missed.

Barry was really committed to his fellow residents and not worried about confronting officers and councillors on their behalf. He was a lovely guy and will be sorely missed.

Thank you, Barry, for your tireless work always done in good spirit. You will be missed.

2 ACTIONS AND MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 2.1 Mr D Spafford referred to paragraph 3.4 in the Minutes and said that it did not accurately reflect the issue. Tenants should not have to address anti-social behaviour, and potentially put themselves at risk, but rather it should be professional people who did that.
- 2.2 Cllr Shanks asked if the minutes could state who the representatives were attending on behalf of.
- 2.3 Cllr Shanks referred to the Actions and was concerned that there was still no date for the replacement of windows at Sylvan Halls. Mr Gage said that officers were currently preparing a programme of major and planned works and it was hoped that that would be published in the next 6-8 weeks. He advised that the works at Sylvan Halls would not be undertaken this financial year but would be part of the programme from April 2023.
- 2.4 The Chair asked if a forward programme of works could be provided for the next round of Area Panels, and officers agreed that a three-year plan for major capital works and planned works would be provided.
- 2.5 **RESOLVED:** The Minutes, subject to the comments from Mr Spafford, and the Actions from the meeting held on 17 May 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

3 HOUSING COMMITTEE WORKPLAN PROGRESS UPDATE AND HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 1 2022/23

- 3.1 Ms Harris, Mr Gage, Mr Ritchie introduced the report as set out in the agenda.
- 3.2 Ms Mackey said that two female tenants at Highcroft Lodge had asked a number of times for repairs to be made but nothing had been done which was concerning. Mr Ritchie said that he would look into this case, and advised that once a call was logged tenants didn't need to contact the Council again. It was anticipated that in the next months progress would have been made on the backlog of cases. The Community Engagement Officer asked if a reference number would be given when an issue was raised. Officers advised that any job logged would be given a reference number but that wouldn't automatically be given to the tenant, but any repair would be logged against the address. Cllr Shanks asked if jobs were prioritised. Mr Ritchie said that they were and would depend on the job and who it was for, for example if it was a water leak that would have priority, and if the person was disable etc. Call handlers

were advised to assess the needs of the person and the repairs needed when logging the jobs.

- 3.3 Mr D Spafford asked if there was a timescale for jobs to be completed by. Mr Ritchie said it was hoped that the backlog would be completed by the end of the financial year. Mr Spafford understood that additional staff were being recruited. He was advised that 58 new members of staff had started, and the backlog was reducing. However, additional agency staff may be appointed to assist with the backlog.
- 3.4 Cllr Shanks referred to section 1 'Provide additional affordable homes' and asked if the information could show which relate to 'shared ownership' and which to 'affordable rented'. Officers said they would provide that after the meeting.
- 3.5 Ms Mackey referred to section 3 'Alleviating homeless and rough sleeping' and asked how they were counted. Officers said that they had to follow the methodology set out by the government. It was accepted that it wouldn't capture all the homeless people but where the same process was used it showed whether the number was increasing or decreasing.
- 3.6 Mr Spafford said the report said that the Council were developing a strategy for temporary housing and noted that Seaside Homes provided 499 temporary housing properties and asked how their future plans were developing. Ms Harris said they did not know the future plans for Seaside Homes but the Council were looking to increase the amount of in-house temporary accommodation. Mr Spafford said that there appeared to be an inability by the Council to manage Seaside Homes, and the Council could liquidate it, but the cost of that could be around £28m. It would be difficult to find that money from the Housing Revenue Account. The city needed ethical housing for key workers and Seaside Homes could develop that and maintain control of Seaside Homes by refinancing them through the Loans Board which would bring an income to the Council. The Chair said that the Council were exploring the legal options and would bring forward a decision in due course.
- 3.7 Cllr Shanks asked how long on average people were in emergency accommodation for, and was advised it was six months.

4 RESIDENT QUESTIONS - 3 STAR

4.1 Making our city safe for pedestrians

Mr Broadman felt that the response didn't answer the question.

Officers referred to the response which said that the Council were in the process of reviewing policies on how highways were managed. City Clean and City Parks were working at weed management. The Chair suggested that this issue would be brought back once the policy had been considered by the Environment Transport & Sustainability Committee.

4.2 Key Fobs

Ms Harris provided an update and said that when the contract with key fobs was first taken on the keys couldn't be cloned, but then became aware that they could be. How that compromised security was now being looked at. Reports of people tailgating had been received and people sleeping in blocks and that may be a bigger security issue.

Mr Broadman asked if it was possible to identify an original key with a cloned was and was advised it wasn't. However, keys could be deactivated, but officers were unsure if it would be possible to put a fix on the software that goes with key fobs to identify where there had been a clone. Mr Broadman suggested it might be a national issue and affect other authorities. Ms Harris agreed and said they would check other authorities to see how they were responding to the issue.

A further update would be provided at the next Area Panel

4.3 *Planned Maintenance Schedule*

Mr Spafford asked on the progress of procuring an Asset Management IT System. Mr Gage said the procurement process was underway but wouldn't be in place until 2024. The current system would continue to be used and updated where necessary. The planned maintenance programme would be done in-house with a three-year plan and then a five-year plan.

4.4 *Housing Allocations Policy*

Content with the response provided.

4.5 *Empty Council Properties*

Mr Spafford asked if the Council were still using sub-contractors on vacant properties, and was advised they were.

4.6 *Lack of Social Housing for Families*

Content with the response provided.

4.7 *Refuse and Recycling*

Content with the response provided.

4.8 *Kitchen Replacement and Repairs*

Content with the response provided.

4.9 *Repairs*

Already discussed earlier in the meeting.

4.10 *Field Officer*

Ms Dowdall provided further information about the walkabouts. The Field Officers were not involved in pilot walkabout which was done by housing managers who arranged a twelve-week programme of walkabouts. That had now finished but had been well attended by both residents and councillors. There was now a period of review looking at how to go forward with estate walkabouts and whether that would include field officers. Those who had taken part in earlier walkabouts had been asked to complete a survey on how felt they had it had gone. The outcome of the review would be brought to Area Panels. It was felt the walkabouts had been successful and it was hoped to start them again in October.

Mr Spafford said that Field Officers were funded by the HRA and asked what work they undertook for residents. Officers advised that the funding was for one post. Ms Dowdall said that they were asked to undertake duties such as witness noise issues, provide anti-social behaviour witness statements, were involved with environmental improvement board work etc. Ms Warren said that stats could be provided on

intervention work they had been involved in on estates. It was agreed that that information would be provided for the next Area Panel.

Ms Mackey said that residents at Highcroft Lodge welcomed the estate walkabouts and the estate management inspections, but would like to know the objectives were, what the success criteria was and what the evaluation would be. Officer said the objective was to build connections between residents and local housing managers, find out what environmental improvements were wanted. The focus was not on repairs, although health and safety repairs would be noted, but was mainly on environmental improvements. Ms Mackey said it would be useful if a sheet could be provided for residents explaining what the walkabouts were for. Following the review of the walkabout routes that would be provided together with a schedule of the routes for the next two years.

4.11 *Oversight of the Environmental Improvement Budget.*

Mr Broadman said that the appendix which set out the environmental improvement proposals for 2022 was interesting, but it did not contain information on projects which had previously happened and the budget for those, he understood that £500k had previously been spent. Officers confirmed that the environmental budget was £500k per year, with £100k of that coming from the HRA. This budget had been in place for the last three years. Officers were happy to share how the money had been spent, and it included things such as communal gardens, bike racks, bin storage etc.

4.12 *Estate Inspections/Estate Walkabouts*
Discussed earlier in the meeting

4.13 *Refurbishment of Empty Properties*
Content with the response provided.

4.14 *Roof Extension*
Content with the response provided.

4.15 *Long Delays in Repair Work*
Content with the response provided.

5 RESIDENT QUESTIONS - 2 STAR

5.1 *Car Parks at Somerset Point, Essex Place and Warwick Mount*

Ms Mackey said that when leaseholders at Highcroft Lodge bought their homes there was free parking in the car park, but it had since been taken over by a contractor and it now cost more to park there than it did in the street. Due to the cost, people were parking in the street and as there were then empty spaces in the car park people had started to fly tip there. The Chair said that the cost of parking would be looked into.

5.2 *Poor State of Pavements*

Mr Broadman said that commercial garages were using the pavement space and it was difficult to get round them. When enforcement officers were in the area the cars were moved which was frustrating. The Chair suggested that bollards could be placed in those areas. Officers agreed to consider what steps could be taken and would be one issue which could be included in the walkabouts.

6 POSITIVE COMMUNITY NEWS

6.1 There were no items.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7.1 Mr Spafford said that there were now two vacancies for resident representatives on Seaside Homes. It had previously taken over a year to appoint himself and Barry Hughes, and so all the Area Panels needed to decide how they wanted to proceed. The Chair agreed and that they now also needed to look at appointing a Vice-Chair for the Area Panel. Mr William said that he had had a meeting with officers who suggested that he took that position. Ms Barker clarified that was for the resident only meeting, and a Vice-Chair for the Area Panels was also needed. The Chair said that a process to fill that role would be undertaken.

7.2 Ms Mackey said she had been contacted by disability associations who said they would not hold their conventions in Brighton as it was so inaccessible. The Chair asked her to send her the names of the organisations and the issues they had raised.

The meeting concluded at 3.45pm