

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.00PM 4 NOVEMBER 2010

COMMITTEE ROOM 1, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Meadows (Chairman); Wrighton (Deputy Chairman), Allen, Barnett, Older and Phillips

Apologies: Councillors Janio, Kemble and Pidgeon

Co-opted Members: Steve Lawless, LINK

PART ONE

29. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

29A Declaration of Substitutes

29.1 Councillor Dawn Barnett was substitute for Councillor Tony Janio.

Apologies had been received from Councillors Kemble and Pidgeon.

29B Declarations of Interest

29.2 There were none

29C Declarations of Party Whip

29.3 There were none

29D Exclusion of Press and Public

29.4 In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

29.5 RESOLVED – that the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

30. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

30.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

31. CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

31.1 There were none.

32. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

32.1 There were none.

33. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

33.1 There were none.

34. NOTICES OF MOTIONS REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

34.1 There were none.

35. MEMBERS' DEVELOPMENT SESSION ON LEASEHOLD ISSUES

35.1 Dave Arthur, Right to Buy and Leasehold Senior Officer gave a presentation on council leasehold issues to the members. Mr Arthur answered questions from the members afterwards.

35.2 Members asked whether the council would work with leaseholders to come to an agreement over the level of service charges. Mr Arthur said that one of the themes from the leaseholder satisfaction survey showed that some residents wanted works carried out at their building and perhaps a higher level of gardening work to be carried out than currently happened, and were willing to pay more towards this. There was a piece of work being done to agree local levels of grounds maintenance carried out. However, he said that the key items of service charging would always be for works that were absolutely required at the building. When this was the case, like lift replacement for example, the leaseholder was liable to pay their percentage share of the costs incurred by the council. The onus was therefore on the council to ensure costs were good value for money and to work with leaseholders on providing a range of payment options for leaseholders with financial difficulties with major works charges.

35.3 Members queried why the different leasehold terms for Brighton and for Hove properties. They heard that this was due to historic lease agreements where varying them was extremely problematic after they had been entered into. With so many leases created prior to unification it was not helpful to create yet another lease to work with.

35.4 Members asked whether there was any benchmarking done against private rented sector providers in Brighton and Hove. They heard that this did not happen but that the council did benchmark against other city local authorities on home ownership, service charges and other leasehold matters.

35.5 Mr Arthur was thanked for his presentation.

36. CARE QUALITY COMMISSION INSPECTION

36.1 Philip Letchfield, Interim Head of Contracts & Performance, presented a report on the most recent Care Quality Commission's assessment of Brighton and Hove City Council and on the improvement plan that had been agreed. Mr Letchfield then answered members' questions.

Mr Letchfield informed the committee that the future role of the Care Quality Commission in assessing the Council's social care performance had been thrown into doubt by recent central government announcements; the current performance assessment framework was being discontinued with immediate effect. The Chair of ASCHOSC commented that this would leave more of a role for scrutiny, in assessing and challenging the department's performance.

36.2 Members queried how the items agreed in the improvement plan could be carried out in light of the proposed spending review. Mr Letchfield said that he was fairly confident that most of the planned improvements could be met within the current service redesign; there was no additional burden. There were some challenges, particularly on the commissioning side and the wider context was tough. Meeting the improvement plan would be reliant on a number of milestones being met at the right time, eg in personalisation and self-directed care.

36.3 Members asked about the role for advocacy services. They were advised that Adult Social Care was reviewing all of its advocacy services, as it was not evenly provided across different service areas at present.

36.4 Mr Letchfield was thanked for his report and asked to return to ASCHOSC in six months to update the committee on progress.

37. HOUSING REPAIRS AND IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP PROGRESS REPORT

37.1 Nick Hibberd, Assistant Director Housing Management and Glyn Huelin, Partnering and Performance Manager, presented a report on the six month review of the Mears repairs and maintenance contract and addressed members' questions.

37.2 Members asked for more information about the nature of complaints that had been received about the service. They heard from Mr Huelin that about 50% of complaints were about planned works including their scheduling and the other half were about the repairs being carried out including the quality of work that had been done.

Following analysis of the complaints, the team had endeavoured to provide more information to the residents about how work had been scheduled over the three year period and the reason for this. This had led to improved customer satisfaction.

Members heard that 90 complaints had been received over a six month period. This should be seen in the context of over 14000 repairs jobs being carried out over the

same period and indicated complaints had been received about approximately 0.006% of the works being carried out.

One of the unanticipated problems that had been encountered was with the Repairs service working hard to catch up with the backlog of repairs. When the operatives went to the property, they might find a number of other unanticipated repairs that needed to be carried out in order to bring the property up to decent homes standard. This had an impact on the scheduling of other works.

37.3 Members asked whether residents were involved in making decisions about how their kitchens would be designed. Mr Hibberd explained that tenants' representatives were involved at a strategic level although individual residents would not be involved at the strategic stage. However when it came to an individual property, the tenant was involved with the design. At the same time the design needs to take account of the layout of the room and the requirement to meet the Decent Homes standard.

37.4 Members said that they had received feedback from some residents that they had felt some pressure from Mears operatives to have an earlier than agreed appointment. Mears would always make an appointment but operatives were also encouraged to use their time as practically as possible and if they were near a property, they might call the resident unexpectedly to see if they could do the work. Some residents felt under pressure to admit operatives when they were not expecting them.

Mr Hibberd said that he would take this information back to Mears so that they could work with their staff to avoid inadvertently pressurising residents. Members also heard that Mears was training all of its operatives to reach NVQ level 2 in customer service.

37.5 In response to a query about the Apprentice scheme that was in operation, members heard that there were currently six apprentices with plans for nine more to come. The six currently employed were from Whitehawk, with plans to take people from other areas of Brighton and Hove, including Portslade, in the future. Apprenticeships were not restricted to young people, they would be open to all. Apprentices were given the opportunity to use empty council properties in their training.

37.6 Mr Hibberd and Mr Huelin were thanked for their report.

38. HOUSING AND HEALTH INEQUALITIES GROUP

38.1 Andy Staniford, Housing Strategy Manager, presented a follow up report about the Housing and Health Inequality group and answered members' questions.

38.2 Members suggested that care workers could be involved and trained in the Repairs on Prescription service. They heard that the council was looking at options to include a wide range of visiting staff such as District Nurses; Health Visitors; Community Paediatricians and the Rapid Community Response Team; that would all be trained of housing issues to recognise disrepair.

38.3 Members asked about how the group worked with landlords. They heard that the group was very good at liaising with landlords, giving them information about grants that were available. Landlords were represented on the Strategic Housing Partnership. The team tried to see things from both the landlord and tenants' perspective. The team also worked with universities and student unions to make students aware of their rights.

38.4 Members thanked Mr Staniford for his report and asked for an update to come back to the committee in six months.

39. ITEMS TO GO FORWARD TO CABINET OR THE RELEVANT CABINET MEMBER MEETING

39.1 There were no items to go forward to Cabinet.

40. ITEMS TO GO FORWARD TO COUNCIL

40.1 There were no items to go forward to Council.

The meeting concluded at 5.45

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

