

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE SUB-COMMITTEE

3.00pm 23 OCTOBER 2012

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Wakefield (Chair); Councillor Peltzer Dunn (Opposition Spokesperson), Farrow, Jarrett, Pidgeon, Robins, Mears and Shanks

Tenant Representatives Lynn Bennett (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), David Murtagh (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), Trish Barnard (Central Area Housing Management Panel), Jean Davis (Central Area Housing Management Panel), Tina Urquhart (West Area Housing Management Panel), Roy Crowhurst (West Area Housing Management Panel) Tony Worsfold (Leaseholder Action Group), Barry Kent (Tenant Disability Network), Charles Penrose (Sheltered Housing Action Group) and Keith Cohen (Hi Rise Action Group).

PART ONE

18. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

18A Declarations of Substitute Members

18.1 Councillor Mears declared that she was attending as a substitute for Councillor Wells. Councillor Shanks declared that she was attending as a substitute for Councillor Duncan.

18B Declarations of Interests

18.2 There were none.

18C Exclusion of the Press and Public

18.3 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.

18.4 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

19. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 19.1 The Chair welcomed Keith Cohen, Roy Crowhurst and Charles Penrose to the meeting. Keith had been elected as the representative for the Hi Rise Action Group, Roy as representative for the West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel and Charles as the representative for the Sheltered Housing Action Group.
- 19.2 The Chair reminded everyone that The City Assembly was taking place on Saturday 17th November 9.30 to 4.00pm at Hove Town Hall. The key themes for the day would be:
- Changes to benefits/welfare reform - Update and meet the teams and services who can help with advice and support
 - Information Cafe - find out about training, courses and social activities; money and benefits advice; getting online; community spirit - getting people involved.
 - Elections for Assembly Chair and Community Safety Forum Rep
 - Have your say on balancing the budget.
 - Creche facilities available, lunch and refreshments provided.
 - The event could be followed on twitter or online through the live webcast.
- For more info or to book a place for the creche, attendees should contact the Resident Involvement Team on 294651

20. MINUTES

- 20.2 **RESOLVED** That the Minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee held on 4 September 2012 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

21. CALL-OVER

- 21.2 It was agreed that all items be reserved for debate and determination.

22. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

- 22.1 There were no petitions, written questions or deputations.

23. ISSUES RAISED BY COUNCILLORS

- 23.1 There were no petitions, written questions, letters or notices of motion from councillors.

24. HOUSING ADAPTATIONS

- 24.1 The Sub Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which provided an update on housing adaptations. A report had been requested at the Housing Committee held on 26 September 2012. The report provided background information on the role of the Integrated Housing Adaptations Team within Housing Commissioning, and the work being undertaken to improve access to housing adaptations across all tenures in the city.

24.2 Mr Crowhurst was aware that some properties had had adaptations which were not needed by the current tenants, and asked whether officers received training on letting properties which had been adapted. Officers advised that surveyors and letting agents did receive training. Properties were advertised appropriately, adapted properties were ring fenced and those who had particular needs were taken to view flats to ensure they were appropriate.

24.3 Councillor Mears asked how much money remained in the budget for adaptations, and asked what would happen if the budget ran out as it was important that all those who had been assessed received the work needed. Officers advised that should there be any shortfall it would be topped up from the budget from the Housing Revenue Account. It was anticipated that there may need to be a top up during the current financial year of around £200,000 to £300,000. The budget was monitored and any increases within the current financial year would be reported to Policy and Resources Committee through Targeted Budget Monitoring report. In addition, officers advised that increased annual HRA funding for council housing adaptations is being identified within future HRA capital programme budgets. For the private sector housing adaptations, private sector housing renewal capital funding, supported by borrowing against New Homes Bonus following the end of Government financial support for housing renewal, has been used to 'top up' the Government Disabled Facilities Grant allocation to support a total budget of £1.1m. There is no private sector housing renewal funding currently identified for next financial year. This year the cost and commitments of adaptations to the private sector would exceed the money available and discussions were being held with the Finance Team. Councillor Jarrett was supportive of continued funding to maintain private sector housing adaptations budget. Councillors Mears asked if a report providing more details on this could be provided for a future meeting. The Chair agreed.

24.4 Mr Penrose noted that it had been four years since he last attended the meeting as a tenant representative, and was pleased to note how much the performance had improved.

24.5 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 3.5 of the report which gave the number of new referrals received each month and the current number of cases in the assessment process, and asked why it appeared to be taking longer to deal with applications. Officers advised that the information provided was intended to give a snapshot of work being undertaken, and the cases in progress were at different levels of assessment. Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked if a report could be provided giving more detailed information. The Chair agreed.

24.6 **RESOLVED**

1. That the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee noted the background information and service improvements to better manage the demand for adaptations, the improved assessment and delivery times, and the current situation concerning capital budgets.

2. That the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee noted and approved the proposals to improve communication and client involvement through the team's on-gong work with the Brighton & Hove Federation for Independent Living and the Tenants Disability Network.

25. **HOUSING & SOCIAL INCLUSION PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 1 2012/13**

- 25.1 The Sub Committee considered the Housing and Social Inclusion Performance report for Quarter 1 for the financial year 2012-13.
- 25.2 Councillor Shanks thanked officers for the report and was very pleased to note the impressive statistics. Councillor Shanks asked how the authority compared with other authorities. The Sub Committee was informed that officers were looking to provide benchmark information for the next year end report.
- 25.3 Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 3.3 and noted that the target for rent collection was 98.75% and suggested that the target should be 100%. Officers agreed that the aspiration should be to collect 100% of rent, but accepted that that would never be possible. Rent collection was excellent and the target was set at 98.75% in order to give staff a manageable figure to achieve.
- 25.4 Councillor Mears referred to appendix 1 to the report, and noted that there was one property in Hangleton and Knoll which had been empty for 630 days and asked why it had not been transferred to the Local Delivery Vehicle. Officers advised that the property required substantial repairs and had not been suitable for transfer to Seaside Homes.
- 25.5 Mr Crowhurst referred to paragraph 3.5 and asked for clarification on whether the percentage of appointments kept, were those kept by Mears or by tenants. Officers confirmed it was the percentage of appointments kept by Mears.
- 25.6 Councillor Robins noted that the tables in the report had a column for 'Service Pledge', and asked what that referred to. Officers advised that following consultation with tenants a few years ago, the authority had made a pledge that certain things would be undertaken. It was agreed that a list of those pledges would be circulated to members of the Sub Committee.
- 25.7 Mr Kent referred to the level of rent collected and asked how quickly tenants are advised if they were in arrears. Officers advised that an initial letter would be sent two weeks after monies were due, and then a follow up letter would be sent after four weeks if monies were still outstanding.
- 25.8 **RESOLVED** - That the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee note the report.
- 26. ACTION PLAN FOR SUGGESTIONS FROM INNOVATION GROUP REPORT ON RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT**
- 26.1 The Sub Committee considered the report which set out the action plan for suggestions of the Innovation Group, as requested at the previous Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee (HMCSC) held on 4 September 2012. However, there was concern that the original report on the Innovation Group was not appended to the report. It was agreed by all present that it would be preferable to defer this report to the next meeting of the HMCSC, which due to be held on 18 December 2012, when the original report would be included.

27. ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS 2012

- 27.1 The Sub Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which provided a copy of the Annual Report for year ending 31 March 2012 which is sent to all council tenants and leaseholders. Members of the Sub Committee were asked to comment on both the Annual Report (appendix 1 to the report) and the summary version of the report (appendix 2 to the report).
- 27.2 Councillor Farrow thanked officers for producing the Annual Report, but felt that it could be improved. It was important that the document was read, and it was therefore important to ensure it was accessible to all. Councillor Farrow suggested that the Annual Report be passed to journalists within the council to see if it could be improved. Officers advised that the document had been produced in conjunction with the Corporate Design Team. There was a legal requirement to produce the report, and officers had liaised with tenant groups when producing it. Whilst it was very important that the document was read, it was also important that it contained the necessary information. It was essential to get the balance right and have the information available in an accessible way, but at the same time not to patronise anyone.
- 27.3 Councillor Mears appreciated the work which had gone into producing the Annual Report and agreed that it was necessary to strike the right balance, but had concerns that it was too simplistic. On page 56 there was a heading for 'What we are doing', and she suggested that information on the number of kitchens and bathrooms fitted would be useful. On page 60 there were two diagrams showing Income and Expenditure, and Councillor Mears thought the information was not detailed enough. There was a figure for 'Rents, other' which needed further explanation. Officers agreed that information could be included, and also suggested that additional information could be provided under 'Value for Money'.
- 27.4 Mr Crowhurst thanked officers for the report and felt that a good balance had been reached. He agreed that more information could be provided, but it was important that there weren't pages of facts and figures as that could put people off reading it.
- 27.5 Mr Cohen thanked officers for preparing the Annual Report and agreed that it was important to get the wording correct to ensure as many people as possible read it. Mr Cohen suggested that a short version of the Annual Report be provided for Homing In.
- 27.6 Councillor Shanks thought it was a very good report with good news contained within it. There was a section on anti-social behaviour, and Councillor Shanks asked whether there were a number of departments within the council all dealing with that issue. Officers advised that there was Corporate Safety Team which Housing worked closely with to ensure there was no duplication of work.
- 27.7 Ms Barnard asked for clarification on whether bullying, name calling etc would be classed as anti-social behaviour. It was confirmed it would.
- 27.8 Councillor Peltzer Dunn thanked officers for the report, but noted there were a few inconsistencies. Some parts of the report referred to 'working days', or 'days', and it would be useful to use one or the other. For example the report said that the average time to re-let a property was 17 days, but it wasn't clear if that was working days.

Councillor Peltzer Dunn suggested that additional information could be provided. He referred to the summary sheet which referred to the 'ASB' service, and thought it would be useful to clarify what that stood for. Page 60 of the report, which gave the Income and Expenditure could explained more clearly, and suggested that there could be a diagram showing how each pound of rent collected was spent.

27.9 Officers agreed to consider all the comments and suggestions. An updated version of the Annual Report and Summary Sheet would be circulated to all members of the Sub Committee.

27.10 **RESOLVED** - That the comments of the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee on the 2012 Annual Report to Council Tenants and Leaseholders and of the Summary version be noted.

The meeting concluded at 5.00pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of