
Items from Tenants Only Meeting held on Wednesday 04/11/14

1. Mears response to complaints about repairs

Jenny said that an elderly resident in Coldean has had problems for years with a cold backdraft from her extractor fan. When Jenny spoke to the Mears' liaison officer about this she was told that she should phone the repairs line. However, when Mears' did come out it was found that a part of the original fan had not been fitted properly, which was the cause of the problem.

Those at the meeting felt that the Mears' liaison officers should be available to listen to issues raised by reps and take action where appropriate.

It was also felt that the most effective way of resolving matters is to make a complaint directly to the council, rather than going through Mears' complaints procedure.

Action: Ray to raise this at the Area panel meeting and ask for clarification on how reps can raise ongoing repairs issues

Response from Perrin Horne, Partnership & Resident Liaison Manager, 01273 294641

We are very pleased that the situation with the elderly resident was resolved following a repair being carried out.

Mears Resident Liaison team (RLT) are always available to speak to tenant representatives regarding repair issues, however, if a repair has not been previously reported, then it is best to start with the repairs team in the first instance. Mears RLT are not only resident liaison officers, but they also supervise the repairs team.

If a repair has been previously reported and is still outstanding then the repairs helpdesk staff are the best people to discuss this with in the first instance.

If a tenant is still unhappy with the response from the repairs helpdesk then resident representatives can use the Resident Representatives process which was set up specifically for elected reps:

Beyond speaking to the repairs team, reps can call the Property & Investment Team on 01273 293427 or email P&Ienquiries@brighton-hove.gov.uk and they can help look into the matter on your behalf.

If reps are still unhappy with the response from Property & Investment then resident representatives can contact the Standards & Complaints Team on 01273 291070 or email complaints@brighton-hove.gov.uk

The process for tenant representatives has been in place since 2012. It was developed with residents in the Repairs and Maintenance Monitoring Group (a precursor to the

current Home Group). At the time tenant representatives had expressed their frustrations were frustrated at not being able to contact anyone else other than the repairs helpdesk when they had issues with ongoing repairs issues. Resident Representatives who use the process feedback very positively.

2. Mears completion of multi-trade jobs

There has been an ongoing problem with jobs that require more than one trade. When one trade signs off their part of the job, the whole job is then considered to be completed and the rest of the work doesn't get done. Tenants are then often left having to chase up the job for a long time before it gets finished.

This has previously been reported to Mears, but there have not been any improvements.

Action: Ray and Bob to raise at Area Panel and ask Mears for information on what action is being taken to remedy this problem.

Response from Perrin Horne Partnership & Resident Liaison Manager 01273 294641

This issue was raised recently at the Home Service improvement Group and Mears prepared a presentation and attended to answer questions raised.

Mears have put a lot in place to try to prevent this issue. They have a surveyor who works on larger multi-trade repairs projects managing them through to completion. They also have improved the communication from the operatives back to the office by changing the further works form they submit after attending a repair. This now includes an area for other trades along with an estimated time to complete and any materials that have been ordered in readiness. They are also updating the jobs with referral notes across teams such as 'once roof leak has been fixed advise plastering team as the ceiling will need to be repaired', 'after bath install pass job to specialist team for wall tiling to be redone', 'after WC pan and WHB has been renewed raise further works for the bathroom flooring to be removed and replaced'.

It would be really helpful if Mears could have the job numbers or addresses that the issues have been flagged on as that way Mears can continue to improve this aspect of the service, see if there are any weak areas they need to focus on and try to identify any training needs for staff members or contractors.

3. Permission for tenants to carry out internal modifications and improvements

When tenants want to carry out work to the inside of their homes they have to ask for permission in writing. However, they are then given a verbal response, and therefore have no evidence that they were given permission if this is queried in the future.

Two examples were given:

- John McCabe asked for permission to put up shelves in his flat. An asbestos survey was carried out, but he was not informed of the results. When he chased it up he was told that there wasn't considered to be any asbestos and it would be fine for him to put up shelves. However, this was not confirmed in writing.*
- Heather Hayes asked for permission to replace two internal doors. She was told that she could do this as long as she keeps the doors that she removes, but this was not confirmed in writing.*

Action: Ray and Bob to raise at Area Panel and ask for a change in practice to be considered to ensure that when tenants are given permission to carry out internal works it is done in writing rather than verbally.

Response from Janet Dowdell, Housing Customer Services: – 01273 293191

You do not need permission to decorate the inside of your home or to carry out minor improvements such as tiling. Both installation of shelving and changing internal doors would be classed minor improvements and the tenants' responsibility. A written response would not be provided as requests about these would not be required.

The tenant would be responsible for the removal of shelves and making good the walls and replacing internal doors when and if they move out, and this is in the Tenancy Agreement. Failure to do so could result in a recharge to the outgoing tenant. Tenants must not fit polystyrene (or similar material) ceiling tiles or coving as they are a fire risk. If they did they would need to pay for the cost of their removal.

The council encourages tenants to carry out improvements to their homes but asks that they seek permission before starting work when the improvements are not minor. Tenants that are on an introductory tenancy are NOT permitted to undertake alterations, unless they have prior agreement with a member of the Housing Customer Services Team to apply.

We will not normally refuse permission for work unless it is likely to affect the safety of the building, cause a future maintenance problem, or cause a nuisance to your neighbours. Sometimes, we may attach conditions to the permission, such as insisting that the work is carried out by a competent contractor and to a satisfactory standard, but this will depend on the alteration request type.

All requests need to be in writing to the Housing Customer Service Team and there is an application form for this purpose. The team will provide a written response and keep a detailed record of all requests on the tenancy file for future reference.

4. Pigeons

There are a lot of pigeons around Laburnum Grove and residents regularly have to clean the bird mess from their window sills. This presents a potential hazard to residents if they become affected by the bacteria or diseases that are present in bird mess.

Action: Ray and Bob to raise at Area Panel and ask what the council's policy is on installation of pigeon deterrents.

Response from Perrin Horne Partnership & Resident Liaison Manager 01273 294641

We will liaise with the scheme manager to understand the specific issue in more detail at Laburnum Grove.

We will then look at whether we can address the issue by either discouraging feeding of the birds by tenants or looking at prevention measures to the block as a whole.

In most cases residents are responsible for ensuring their homes are pest free. However, we understand that prevention measures are necessary in some cases, but these are dealt with on an individual basis and the situation is looked at as a whole when reported. In the majority of cases we will only deal with infestation issues for communal areas and not individual flats or dwellings. We unfortunately no longer repair the nets or install them as a matter of course. In the recent past Housing has turned down an EDB bid for netting on a roof as birds can get trapped and this then has implications.

The Estate Development Budget is available for residents to apply for improvements to their blocks. In this case it may be possible to provide pigeon spikes (or similar) to deter them from roosting.

Please speak to your Resident Involvement Officer for guidance about how to apply bid via EDB if pigeons are causing a nuisance for whole block.

5. Lift replacement programme

Laburnum Grove residents have been waiting for a new lift for a long time, and have not been told how soon the work will be done. There is now water seeping into the lift when there is heavy rain, which causes an awful smell and could be hazardous if it comes into contact with the electrics.

Action: Ray and Bob to raise at Area Panel and ask for a copy of the lift replacement programme, showing the dates on which the remaining lifts will be fitted.

Response from James Deamer, Lift Engineer, Contract Compliance Team – 01273 295994

Laburnum Grove lift replacement is currently programmed for the financial year 2016-2017. It was originally earmarked for replacement in 2019-2020. I cannot confirm actual dates other than it will take approximately 12 weeks and take place between May 2016 and March 2017.

We are aware of the water ingress into the lift pit. The cause is the design of the existing lift combined with what is thought to be rising and falling ground water levels. The water level has been monitored over the past year and has reached a maximum depth of 150mm. The water would have to be approximately 900mm in depth before contact would be made with any electrics, these electrics are protected by fuses and/or circuit breakers.

A solution commonly adopted with water ingress would be to install a “sump pump” where the water would be pumped out to a local drain every time a predetermined water level was reached. Unfortunately a sump pump solution cannot be implemented at Laburnum as the water in the lift pit is contaminated with hydraulic oil and cannot be disposed of into the sewers. A decision has been made to resolve the water ingress issue during the lift replacement works in 2016-17.

6. Water fountain in sheltered housing schemes

Laburnum Grove has a water fountain in the garden, and when the pump broke down they applied for an EDB grant to replace it. As a result the Housing Officer visited with a Health and Safety Officer, and the decision was made that the water feature could become a host of Legionnaires disease and that the water fountain should be drained.

It has now been reported in the Argus that the water feature at Elwyn Jones Court may also have to be drained and filled in.

The residents at Laburnum Grove were not informed that the Health and Safety Officer would be visiting, or invited to be present during the visit. They were further upset when they were not informed of his decision, but that the local MP was.

The meeting felt that this ruling was incorrect and unfair for the following reasons:

- *Legionnaire's disease occurs in warm water that is left to stagnate, which was not the case with the Laburnum Grove water feature.*
- *The same rule is not applied to public fountains in central Brighton*

Action: Ray and Bob to raise at Area Panel and ask:

- ***Why the residents of Laburnum Grove were not informed of the decision regarding their water fountain***
- ***Why sheltered housing fountains are being treated differently to the fountains in the Old Stein.***

Response from Rosie Wakley, Mechanical & Electrical Manager, Property & Investment: – 01273 293348 and Peter Huntbach, Older Peoples Housing Manager :- 01273 293248

Following the EDB bid submission it was identified that water features sometimes put in by tenants on housing land weren't being controlled in our current safety measures.

Housing's sheltered schemes have residents that fall in the demographic profile of those who are most vulnerable to infection from water-borne viruses which means that the regime applied to manage the risks is much more stringent than in other areas.

Adrian Day, the Mechanical & Electrical teams' specialist contractor for water safety, did speak directly with Bob Spacie and Bridget Dubeau, Scheme Manager, to explain the risk of legionella, E.coli and other waterborne bacteria due to the lack of maintenance of the water feature at Laburnum Grove.

Around the same time Adrian had also spoken to Elwyn Jones Court residents about the same issues. The majority of residents had agreed that due to the risk, they would remove the water feature at their scheme. Following the Argus article these residents changed their mind and said they wished to keep it.

At time of writing Adrian Day and Rosie Wakley are finalising extensive risk assessments and cost implications of safe maintenance of all water features across sheltered housing. We will assess the implications of cost and practicality, balance these against the wishes of residents, and come up with a plan going forward.

If reasonable measures can be taken to maintain the facilities (which may not be the case) it's likely that site-specific responsibilities will have to be shared by the scheme managers and residents as well as M&E. Where the cost falls for this will also have to be determined.

After this is finished, Adrian is happy to attend a tenants meeting to explain in person the whole picture for the future of these features

With regard to public fountains: Housing's M&E team have no involvement in the management of these – they are managed by the corporate M&E team and will be subject to a maintenance regime as recommended under the HSE's legionella approved code of practise, L8.