

Items from the Tenant Only meeting held on 06/08/15

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**1. Super Area Panels**

*The Chair asked the meeting for any feed-back on the Super Area Panel held in May at the Moulsecoomb Housing Centre.*

*The following comments were made:*

- It was a mixed success. The original idea was to present the conclusions from the Strengthening the Area Panels Task and Finish Group, but a lot of other items were added to the agenda which made it over long.*
- Brevity is important and should be aimed for – not every detail of every report needs to be gone through minutely.*
- The meeting was originally planned for June, but was moved back to May, in order to fit in with the June Housing Committee. In fact, because of the elections, this change of date wasn't necessary. There was concern that the meeting had been rushed through.*
- Not enough notice was given of the date. If residents are expected to participate fully, it is essential that there is good notice and clear publicity well in advance.*
- Papers must also be distributed well in advance to give residents enough time to read them, talk to their members and make useful contributions.*
- There was concern that introducing Super Area Panels might lead to a reduction in ordinary Area Panels.*
- Moulsecoomb Housing Centre is not a popular venue. It is inconvenient for a lot of groups, and not a comfortable space. It is important to have a more central location.*

*It was proposed that the following organisational procedures be adopted for future Super Area Panels:*

- The Super Area Panel residents' group, made up of resident representatives from each Area, is fully involved in the planning and organisation of Super Area Panels.*
- Decisions about dates, venue, and the agenda should all be made in consultation with the SPA residents' group.*
- There is a lead-in period of 12 weeks, allowing time for consultation with the SPA residents' group and advertising of the meeting.*

*This was agreed unanimously, and it will be put forward with a \*\*\* star rating, so it goes to the blue pages for every Area Panel.*

*Action: proposal for Blue Pages \*\*\**

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**Response from Becky Purnell – Resident Involvement Manager – T: 01273 293022**

A Special Area Panel was called as there were a number of reports that were required to go before the Area Panels to fit in with the timing of the Housing and New Homes Committee. All reports relevant directly to tenants and leaseholders go to the Area Panels. As this was an additional Area Panel and there were a lot of officer's reports it was decided to bring the Panels together in order to save resources.

There were no Resident Only meetings or blue pages for this additional Panel so the agenda was limited to council agenda items. This would be the case for future Special Area Panels. Residents on the City Assembly subgroup of the Involvement & Empowerment Group plan the agenda of the City Assembly and would welcome ideas for agenda items. We are sorry that the papers for the Special Area Panel were a little late, this was due to the timescales being very tight with reports needing to first go to the Housing Leadership Team then to the Special Area Panel and then on to the Housing and New Homes Committee pre-meeting.

### **3. Reinstatement of Housing Management Consultative sub-Committee**

*The Chair said that Central Residents Only meeting passed a proposal asking for the reinstatement of the Housing Management Sub-Committee (HMCSC). He had been contacted by the Chair of Central and asked to raise this at the West meeting.*

*The proposal is that: 'The new Council administration re-instates the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee (HMCSC) and that this is discussed at all of the next Area Panels.' There was agreement that the HMCSC had been a useful committee, providing a city-wide perspective. The proposal was supported unanimously, and it was agreed to put it forward on the Blue Pages.*

*Action: following proposal for Blue Pages: 'It is proposed that the new Council administration re-instates the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee (HMCSC) and that this is discussed at all of the next Area Panels.'*

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#### **Response from Ododo Dafe – Head of Income, Inclusion and Improvement – T: - 01273 293201**

Thank you for raising this question. Also it is a good example of a response that should feed through to all Area Panels as it will be of citywide interest, or that tenants wish to be on the agenda of each of the panel meetings.

In response, it is important for me to initially outline that the decision regarding the abolition of the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee(HMCSC), was not one that was taken by the then Housing Committee, and neither was it taken on party political grounds. The matter was discussed at the all-party Constitutional Working Group, and the decision was made at the May 2014 Policy & Resources Committee – which did take into account feedback from the Area Panels which in the majority wanted to keep HMCSC.

In case it helps, I have set out here some of the reasons that the change was made:-

1. HMCSC was unique - there was no other sub-committee in the council. It didn't make decisions but served a useful advisory role at the time when the council had an executive system with only one Executive Councillor making decisions. Whereas in the current cross-party committee system, the Sub-Committee stood out as an arguably extravagant and outdated way to achieve limited consultation with a limited number of tenants – particularly when other methods were available.
2. There was significant duplication and overlap between the Area Panels and HMCSC, with both providing a forum for tenant consultation and for tenant representatives and councillors to jointly debate matters.
3. Housing, and the council generally, needed to make efficiencies in time and costs in order to meet the increasing demands made upon services – for example by higher numbers of vulnerable tenants, and as a result of welfare reforms. These conditions still exist today and are ever more important – particularly with additional changes to welfare

reforms that will affect almost 70% of tenants. HMCSC required significant staff and financial resources which are more effectively used to meet tenants' needs.

4. On the matter of costs, the following paragraphs also appeared in the report to Area Panels in March 2014:-

“...Costs are important, particularly as public funds are involved – with council rents being significantly subsidised by tax payers. There is also the issue of officer, councillor and tenant time involved in a process that is duplicated.

Any savings that can be made in these austere times are helpful to tenants in the round as the money is reinvested into housing services. There is a big demand for social housing, with an equally large responsibility on the council to provide value for money services, exercise prudence, and invest in meeting that demand.”

5. Tenants' views could and still can be effectively represented in the consultation section of committee reports for decision making - arguably in more ways and with greater ease than for any other group of people in the city receiving council services. In addition, as with the other council committees, if residents wish, they can make deputations to the committee or submit a letter for response.
6. Housing is now one service with different and overlapping 'customers' or service users across the city who are not solely council tenants – for example people on the housing waiting list, home owners, private sector tenants, people in need of adaptations, homeless households. Yet only council tenants attended HMCSC.
7. There still exist a range of other ways that tenants are involved, for example Service Improvement Groups, Area Panels, City Assembly and through the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.
8. The tenants' indicative vote was rarely used at HMCSC, and feedback from Area Panels is currently able to provide decision makers with a broader feedback base and differing perspectives.
9. Area Panels may take on more of a 'neighbourhood governance' role in the future and will want to increase their collaborative working style with communities and be able to increasingly influence decisions in a variety of other ways, and possibly through a number of committees, not solely Housing.

Following the Policy & Resources Committee, work was also carried out with Area Panel representatives and officers to look at how Area Panels could be further strengthened, with an example of an outcome from that being that Blue Page items are now placed at the beginning of the agenda.

A review of resident involvement is due to take place towards the end of this calendar year, and all aspects will be considered for potential further areas for improvement.