

Items from the Tenant Only meeting held on 18/08/15

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**1. Matters arising from the Blue Pages**

*When blue pages items are discussed at Area Panel residents are asked to vote on whether they accept the response they have received.*

*However, the item that has been agreed is rarely followed up with residents and information is not provided as to when the work agreed will be carried out.*

*For example, at the Area Panel on 3<sup>rd</sup> August, residents raised the problems of damp in Coldean Houses that were built with Midhust White interior bricks.*

*A clear written response was provided that stated:*

*“We are pleased to inform you that Haig Avenue is currently on this years planned programme to be painted with a specialist coating designed for this brick type. This work will be subject to the statutory leaseholder consultation requirements.”*

*However, no time scale was given for this work, and residents are concerned that it may not be completed before the autumn, when problems of rain and damp will get worse again.*

*They have been told that the work is being delayed due to the leaseholder consultation process, but the general understanding was that leaseholder consultations should be completed within 30 days and should not unduly delay work being carried out.*

*The meeting agreed to propose a new process, to be implemented at all four Area Panel to ensure that residents receive more effective feedback:*

*Following any commitment made at an Area Panel meeting to carry out work, officers will report back to the chairs of the Residents Meeting within 4 weeks (20 working days) to advise them of the date when the work will commence.*

*If the chairs do not receive a response within 4 weeks (20 working days) they will decide on how best to follow up the issue, and this may involve them initiating a formal complaint.*

**Action: (III)**

***It was agreed to put this proposal forward to the Area Panel and to the City Assembly.***

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**Response from Theresa Youngman, Contract Compliance Manager – T:- 01273 293190**

The Property & Investment team provide information to residents regarding proposed works across the city. This can only happen once the budget is agreed at the start of the new financial year. The programming of the agreed projects is then carried out by Mears project manager Phil Ludwig.

We are sorry it is not always possible to give exact timescales for works as this is often dependant on many things, leaseholder consultation being one, weather conditions being another and any emergency work which may take precedence being another consideration. This is why all of our planned work states 'Provisional' before any heading. All projects are subject to change and there can be delays for reasons given above.

Furthermore, in the case of Haig Avenue works, this project has been delayed due to high cost implications and the need for agreement between Mears and the Contract Compliance Team to ensure the council delivers value for money for its residents and leaseholders.

Where possible timescales are given and residents are always informed in advance of works commencing on all projects. We hope you understand why it is not always possible to give this information in the first instance.

If residents wish to make a formal complaint regarding this matter, they are entitled to do so.

## **2. Reinstatement of the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee (HMCSC)**

*The proposal from the Central Residents meeting, that the HMCSC should be reinstated, was read out and discussed.*

*The meeting felt that attendance at the HMCSC had given them more influence, as it was a city wide meeting where councillors, officers and residents were present.*

*It was felt that the influence of residents had been watered down by the new structure, and that the new city-wide groups have not effectively replaced the role of the HMCSC.*

*A vote was taken and there was unanimous agreement to support the proposal from the Central Residents Meeting and put it forward to the next Area Panel.*

### **Action: (II)**

***It was agreed to put this proposal forward to the Area Panel.***

***It is proposed that the new Council administration reinstate the Housing management Consultative Sub-Committee (HMCSC).***

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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.

### **3. Role of Resident Involvement Officers**

*The meeting felt that Resident Involvement Officers (RIOs) have moved away from their role in supporting and advising residents associations, and often undermine what they are doing or attempt to control them.*

*Two examples were given.*

- a. *A RIO put a message on Facebook asking residents to contact her if they want work done in their area. At the same time the Residents Association is attempting to get people to come along to their meetings to discuss work to be done in the area under EDB. If residents can circumvent the residents meetings by going straight to a RIO, this undermines the role of Residents Associations who are trying to bring people together to improve their local area.*
- b. *A RIO brought along the proposed new constitution to the East Central Moulsecoomb Tenants and Residents Association meeting and asked them to discuss it, without anyone having seen it or having had time to think about it in advance. Those present were unhappy with much of the content, which they felt was trying to stop residents speaking openly. They decided to postpone the discussion until they have had time to look at it carefully.*

#### **Action: (II)**

***It was agreed to put this forward to the next Area Panel meeting for discussion***

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#### **Response from Becky Purnell, Resident Involvement Manager – T:- 01273 293022.**

- a. Two years ago the Lewes Road Consortium (LRC) requested that officers help the members identify residents who can benefit from support from the LRC Estates Development Budget (EDB) Clear up fund. The project has been promoted in a number of ways, in the Moulsecoomb Local Action Team Newsletter for example, and the majority of bids have come from Neighbourhood and Tenancy Officers.

At the LRC meeting held on 29 July 2015 it was agreed that all bids including those under the £500 threshold will first go to the LRC for agreement if eligible.

Housing is now just using one Facebook page [www.facebook.com/tenantandleaseholder](http://www.facebook.com/tenantandleaseholder) and will ask the LRC whether they wish to promote the Clear up fund this way.

- b. Following consultation with the Involvement & Empowerment Service Improvement Group, the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee, and two rounds of Area Panels the Model Constitution was updated to bring it in line with the new Recognition Policy. This was agreed by the Housing Committee on 10 September 2014. Associations are being asked to bring their constitutions in line with the Model Constitution that sets out the minimum requirements for a council tenant and resident association to be recognised by the council.

The Resident Involvement Officer has communicated with East Central Moulsecoomb Tenants and Residents Association about this on a number of occasions.

- February 2015 talked through and explained the Model Constitution with the Chair.

- April 2015 emailed the Chair, Secretary and Vice Chair a suggested draft of how the new constitution might look and asked if the committee could review it. Suggested that it could be on the agenda of the upcoming AGM in May.
- 19 June 2015 emailed the Chair and Secretary asking them to prioritise this for next meeting.
- 15 July 2015 went through constitution at the general meeting. She then updated the draft as per the discussions and provided copies for all committee members as agreed at the meeting. She suggested at the meeting that members read through the draft updated document and that if the group were happy they would sign it off at the next general meeting in September.
- 25 August 2015 received a call from the Chair saying some committee members were unhappy with the constitution being changed. On further conversation with another committee member, the Resident Involvement Officer agreed to circulate papers once again to all committee members with an explanation of the process, which has been completed.

Changes to the constitution need to be circulated at least 14 days in advance and agreed by the majority of residents at a quorate general association meeting. I am happy to come to an association meeting to explain the minimum requirements of the Model Constitution and the process of consultation that was undertaken to develop it if members request this.

#### **4. Problems with damp and subsidence**

*There are many properties in Coldean that have ongoing problems with damp, but when residents report it the council say that it is just condensation and offer to put in an extractor fan.*

*Two recent examples of this are 5 Twyford and 15 Haig Avenue.*

*There are also several properties which have large cracks in the outside walls due to subsidence, where no work is proposed to solve the problem.*

*An example of this is 16 Twyford.*

*The meeting felt the council is neglecting its properties and failing to maintain them properly.*

#### **Action: (II)**

***It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and ask for clarification on what action will be taken at properties where there are problems of subsidence and damp.***

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#### **Response from Ben Ashby, Mears Resident Liaison Officer – T:- 01273 574354**

Mears have treated mould growth at 5 Twyford Road using an anti-fungal treatment. On the last treatment in March 2015, Mears advised that the property would benefit from the installation of a passive vent in the bedroom. An appointment was arranged for the vent to be installed in early April, however, the resident of the property cancelled this appointment with Mears, advising that they would call back when they were ready for the works to go ahead.

Mears have completed works in 15 Haig Avenue in response to problems with condensation. – In this we were required to open and clear cavity to the left hand side of the front door. Internally thermaline external wall and skim, finish with 2 coats of Silixene

Mears Senior Surveyor Ken Warren has attended to inspect both 16 and 18 Twyford Road. Neither properties are subsiding. Mr Warren advises that there are cracks in the outer skin of the properties, however these cracks are rust heave from the oxidising wall ties and certainly not from subsidence.

#### **Response from Perrin Horne, BHCC Partnership & Resident Liaison Manager – T:- 01273 294641**

We are sorry you feel the council are not fulfilling their repair obligations, we feel that in the majority of cases and situations we get it right and have much to celebrate. However, improvements can be made and we welcome your input in this.

We are aware that damp and condensation is an ongoing issue for both tenants and the council. All condensation (including severe) is caused by many contributory factors including and not exhaustive, overcrowding (too many people and or animals) in the home, not ventilating the property correctly and regularly, not heating the property regularly or effectively, too much furniture and or belongings (especially against walls), or hanging wet laundry over or too close to radiators and cold bridging.

Cold bridging is usually rectified by thermal boarding the walls inside. Advice is also given to residents in order to help them reduce the levels of condensation.

When attending to reports of damp in a property, Mears carry out a full assessment to diagnose the cause of damp and/or mould in the home. This can be rising damp, penetrative damp or condensation. In some cases it can be all three, in others, and the majority of cases it is in the form of condensation. Upon the completion of Mears assessment, the appropriate works are arranged and completed to resolve the cause of the damp/mould in the property. If the cause of damp/mould in the property is diagnosed as condensation, Mears may advise for an extractor fan or passive vent to be installed which would assist in better air flow in the home, thereby reducing condensation.

The Property & Investment Team along with our partners Mears will be working closely with other Housing Teams to promote awareness around condensation and tackling this problem in a more holistic way in the future.