



## Leasehold Panel

### Minutes of the meeting, 10 June 2010

**1. Attendance:** Mr Selim Buyukdogan, Ms Anna Lovililo, Mr Piers Johnson, Mr D Melzer, Mr Nick Martin-Clark, Ms Lynne Zilkha (HLA Treasurer), Ms Catrina Zahoor, Ms Alena Breckova, Mr H Yuksel, Ms Molly Ejon, Ms Millie Mboizi, Mr B Hines, Ms Y Thompson, Mrs Susan Adewumi, Mrs M Shaw, Ms R Batzias, Ms Sue Brown (HLA Chair), Mrs Anne Goodhew (Vice Chair of Leasehold Panel), Ms Annette Joslyn, Ms M C Merrick, Mrs Delsie Grandson and Mr Roger Kemp (Chair of Leasehold Panel) (22)

Chair: Mr Roger Kemp chaired the meeting.

Apologies: Mr M Pentol and Mrs Perlman.

Officers: Mr Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership, and Mr Bruce Nicholas, Leasehold Project Officer, who took the minutes.

### **2. Review of the Resident Involvement Agreement, Sheryl Hendrickson, Senior Resident Involvement Officer.**

Ms Hendrickson started by circulating a copy of the present Resident Involvement Agreement (RIA). The RIA has the title "Your voice counts". It is available on the website – it is a long document but there is also a summary. She said it had been launched in 2007 and explained it was currently being reviewed by a group of residents to agree on changes and revisions. A review is carried out annually, but the current review was going into more details.

These included style and content, how to measure changes as a result of resident involvement and evaluating how well the organisation involves residents in all service areas. Ms Hendrickson said that the main topics the RIA covers are as follows:

- Ways to get involved
- How we can help you get involved
- First class information – freedom of information

- Meetings that work
- Effective residents' groups
- Reviewing and monitoring the resident involvement agreement
- Complaints about the resident involvement agreement

Ms Hendrickson said that it was proposed to have a finalised draft of the revised RIA by the end of the month. She said she would arrange for a copy of the draft showing the revisions to be placed on the HfH website by the end of the next week.

She then mentioned the fact that consideration continued on the subject of setting up a Residents' Jury and its terms of reference. She suggested the Panel might like to nominate someone to serve on the Working Group that had been set up to look at these matters.

- Action point. The Panel agreed to the election of Mrs Anne Goodhew to represent them on this body.

Mr Kemp thanked Ms Hendrickson for her helpful report.

### **3. Decent Homes update – Larry Ainsworth, Strategic Client Representative, Homes for Haringey.**

Mr Ainsworth circulated a report (Appendix 1) which provides a summary of progress on the Decent Homes Programme. He explained that progress was well ahead of target and that satisfaction levels were very high. In answer to a question he confirmed that questionnaires in future would record leaseholders' views separately from tenants. However since this had only commenced in the current year, it would only be reflected in the figures for future years.

Mr Kemp raised the question as to why the questionnaires continue to be distributed and collected by the contractors who carry out the works, after the practice had been criticised by the Panel. It could be argued that the contractors were monitoring themselves. Monitoring should be carried out by Homes for Haringey.

Mr Ainsworth replied that he would enquire as to whether cost effective alternatives could be made available. It was suggested that plumbing and electrics were important areas to cover in satisfaction surveys. Mr Ainsworth explained that no electrical or plumbing work was being carried out in communal areas as part of the Decent Homes Programme.

The question was raised as to how it was proposed to deal with the identification and removal of asbestos. Mr Ainsworth said the main contractor uses a specialist subcontractor to carry out the asbestos survey and a separate specialist to remove the material when required. Ms Breckova said that she would like to nominate a contractor for this work.

- Action point. Mr Thevanesan said he would ascertain whether this would be possible and report back to the next meeting.

Mr Ainsworth said that often the amount of work involved in locating and identifying asbestos material was fairly straightforward since it was generally used for specific purposes well known in the industry. Ms Breckova asked whether there were any Council records in respect of the housing stock in relation to such matters that might render the need for any asbestos surveys superfluous. Mr Ainsworth said that in such cases where records of this nature existed they would obviously be carefully referred to.

Mr Kemp thanked Mr Ainsworth for his interesting report.

#### **4. Proposal to set up a subgroup of the Panel with regard to the Key Leaseholders Scheme – Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership**

Mr Thevanesan circulated a proposal (Appendix 1) to establish the Key Leaseholders Group as a Subgroup of the Leasehold Panel. Ms Brown pointed out that this proposal had not actually been agreed at the last meeting of the Key Leaseholders Group. Mr Thevanesan accepted that this was the case but said it was still appropriate for the Panel to consider the proposal. Ms Breckova said that since many leaseholders felt the Management Fee was already very high, there would be a lot of opposition to any proposal that resulted in a further increase.

Mr Thevanesan replied that since no additional staff would be required to run the Subgroup it would not incur any additional costs. The question was raised whether a leaseholder could find out whether there were Key Leaseholders in their building and if so who they were. Mr Thevanesan replied that it would generally be possible to indicate whether any leaseholders in the building were already participating in the scheme but it would not be possible to release their names without their consent. The proposal was therefore agreed.

#### **5. Report from the Core Group, 19 May 2010 – Roger Kemp, Chair of the Leasehold Panel** provided the following report to the Panel

Paul Munday, who has taken over the acting director in place of Ola Akinfe, attended the Core Group for the first time in May. He confirmed that the Decent Homes funding had been confirmed for all the work proposed for this year and for all the expenditures incurred in the previous year. Thus all the current year's contracts would soon to be signed and sealed the funding having been confirmed.

Mr Kemp said that he had raised a question in relation to a statement that Haringey Council had "issued instructions" to HfH.

As the latter is an ALMO it should not be subject to instructions from Haringey Council. He queried this since he had supposed that Homes for Haringey was a decision-making body in its own right. In fact he had been learnt this at an Audit Commission meeting. It is hard to see how Homes for Haringey can be truly "arms length" if Haringey Council was controlling its decisions. It was explained that the contract was in the name of Haringey Council (not HfH). The position varies from Council to Council and in the case of some ALMOs the contract is in its name rather than that of the Council.

Mr Kemp said he also had occasion to raise a question under an item on the minutes with regard to who would decide whether a property should be changed from flat to pitch roof. He ascertained that the decision would be made at the level of Strategic Client Representative not the Core Group. He said that this therefore a correction to what he had reported at the last meeting of the Panel. A further point Mr Kemp reported in relation to the minutes of the previous meeting of the Core Group was that it had now considered that the total funding for the whole programme could not be regarded as totally guaranteed, as understood from the previous Core meeting.

Mr Kemp said that a further important matter had been clarified from the minutes in relation to the treatment of asbestos containing material. Leaseholders will only be affected if asbestos is present in the common areas, or it is found in the windows. If it is, then the flat will have to be examined and work carried out. The charge for the mandatory survey will be around £70-£90.

With regard to the Supply Chain Management Group (SCMG) the information was provided that this includes the boroughs of Hackney, Haringey, and Newham. It is run by the client councils with the constructors. The aim to drive down the cost, and drive up added benefits. For example, if one contractor provides a 10 year warranty for a particular piece of work and another provides a 5 year warranty for the same work, they will both have to provide the 10 year warranty if they want to be considered for the work. Savings were confidently expected to be in the region of 6%. It was expected that this would enable more improvement work to be carried out than originally planned with regard to work such as new kitchens, etc. It was reported that interest had been expressed by other boroughs in joining the SCMG.

Mr Kemp said he noted that there had been 192 cases where access had not been obtained to carry out improvement works. There had been a further 122 households which had refused to have the work done (for instance they may already have had new kitchens, so about 4% could not be done for various reasons). Mr Kemp asked what had happened to the money saved. Mr Munday replied that it had been factored into the original figures, that is they had allowed for this level of refusal/no access rate in the original Decent Homes budgets. Refurbishment work will be carried out when there is a change of tenancy, that is when a new tenant takes over.

The money then comes out of the Voids Budget so does not come out of Decent Homes Programme.

Mr Kemp reported that there is also a budget of about £11.4m for Environmental Works (e.g. walls, gates, security, landscaping). Mr Munday said that residents (including leaseholders) would be consulted about this work so they could raise objections if they felt the work was not justifiable. He said only £3.3m has been spent, leaving £8m for environment work which has not been spent to date.

Mr Buyukdogan said that when the windows in his property had been replaced the contractors had damaged the walls. On raising the matter with them he had been informed that they had been instructed by the Council not to make any remedial repairs where these were required. Mr Thevanesan said he could look into the matter but Mr Buyukdogan said that he had raised the matter through the Feedback Team.

Mr Johnson said it would be useful to know what inspections are carried out to check work in progress and on completion. He said that there should be more information about the chain of responsibility for instance as between the Site Manager, the Clerk of Works and the Project Manager.

- Action point. Mr Thevanesan said he would arrange for someone from the Asset Management Team to give more information about this matter.

Ms Breckova queried the satisfaction level of 96%. Mr Thevanesan responded that this was a combined figure for leaseholders and tenants. It had been agreed in future he said that the questionnaire would enable the figures to be analysed separately and this would be shown in the future statistics when published.

## **6. Consideration of whether charges should be made for subletting and the (private) installation of windows as part of the management fee**

– as requested by the Panel

Ms Breckova questioned whether this should be a charge to leaseholders under the terms of the lease. Mr Buyukdogan questioned whether the amount of work involved could justify the charge. Mr Thevanesan responded that the Home Ownership Team now had a policy of sending all the new tenants of leaseholders an information pack. Since there were in the region of 1,300 leaseholders subletting their properties, this comprised quite a large number of information packs each year. This policy was recommended by the Subgroup of the Panel on Subletting.

Mr Thevanesan said that in view of the fact that addressing issues in relation to subletting was essentially an important aspect of the management of the estate, he was recommending in future that the cost of administration in the Home Ownership Team should be spread across all residents, that is across the 21,000 tenanted and leasehold properties. This would significantly reduce this charge to leaseholders, which was in any case quite small. Mr Kemp supported the view that leaseholders should not be charged since he said that the landlord could under the terms of the lease force entry to properties where there was a major problem. The cost could then be recovered from the leaseholder. Ms Breckova said that similar considerations applied to leaseholders who wanted to install their own windows. Mr Thevanesan said that policing such a policy would be quite difficult.

Ms Zilkha said that it was important to emphasise that the landlord was required to enforce the terms of both the lease and the tenancy agreement in the case of secure tenants. In all such cases any costs arising should be recovered from the person responsible for the breach, that is the tenant or the leaseholder. Ms Breckova wanted to know whether there were any plans to increase the management fee. Mr Thevanesan said it was not proposed to increase the management fee. He added that levying a separate administration fee would incur additional costs to recover from individual landlords. Furthermore the purpose of the sublet scheme is to encourage leaseholders to register their sublets so Homes for Haringey can provide better services to all residents. Introducing additional admin fee will only put people off. Mr Johnson said leaseholders also wanted assurance that they were receiving value for money.

Ms Zilkha said that Tenancy Management Officers should play a more active role in addressing problems caused by both leaseholders and tenants. Since most people who rent from leaseholders are paying quite high rents, they are generally not disposed to cause any problems. Mrs Goodhew replied that some problems are caused by leaseholders' tenants nevertheless. She supported the proposal for a charge to be made to both tenants and leaseholders in relation to the registration of subletting. Ms Breckova said the answer was to tackle the people who were causing problems and recharge them the costs of any action required.

With regard to leaseholders installing their own windows Mr Thevanesan reported that there had been 32 consents granted and 445 enquiries during the last financial year. Thus it could be seen that there had been many more enquiries than actual applications for consent.

**7. The question as to whether leaseholders should be charged for community facilities such as 'bathtub' allotments (Campsbourne Estate) and Children's Centre Linksites (Chettle Court Community Centre)** – as requested by the Panel

Mr Thevanesan said that he proposed to draft a policy paper to put before the Council. He said he would present it to the Panel when it had been drafted. This was agreed.

Audit Inspection briefing – Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership. Mr Thevanesan presented a short briefing to the Panel – please see appendix Minutes of the meeting of the 13 May. These were agreed as a true record. There were no matters arising

Forward agenda proposals – Mrs Goodhew said it would be a good idea to have a discussion on estate management as soon as possible.

**8. Any other business.**

Delegate for London Regional Tenant Empowerment Conference. It was agreed to nominate Mrs Goodhew.