



Leasehold Panel

Minutes of the meeting, 11 November 2010

1. Attendance: Mr L Lawrence, Ms Molly Ejon, H Whitely, H Wright, Ms J Tan, Ms Rita Batzias, Ms M C Merrick, Mrs Anne Goodhew (Vice Chair), Ms Sue Brown (HLA Chair), Ms Mary Rawitzer, Mr P Patel, Mr Roger Kemp (Chair of the Leasehold Panel) (12).

Apologies: Mr B Hines, Mrs S Perlman, Mr Ian Lush, Ms Nicole Carpenter and Ms S Adewumi.

Chair: Mr Kemp chaired the meeting.

Officers: Mr Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership, Mr Peter Maddison, Head of Asset Management, Ms Kim Graves, Project Manager, Business Improvement, Business Improvement Team, Sean Gardiner, Team Leader, Broad Water Farm and Mr Bruce Nicholas, Leasehold Project Officer who took the minutes.

2. Asset Management - managing major works programmes, planning future maintenance and involving the main stakeholders – Peter Maddison, Head of Asset Management.

Mr Maddison circulated a short report to the Panel. He began his talk by explaining that Asset Management is responsible for delivering a capital programme of £19 million a year. It also manages the Decent Homes Programme, £197 million of work in total – this year £33.5 million of work is planned to be carried out.

During the current year (year 3 of the programme) 735 homes had been brought up to the Government's decent homes standard, bringing the overall total to 4,491 since the start of the programme. It was expected that Haringey Council's housing stock would be 80% decent by the end of the year. He said he would not go into any detail about this side of things, since Pauline Hinds, Strategic Client Representative had given a talk on this subject to the Panel very recently.

Homes for Haringey was still not sure how it would be affected by the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, but it was certain that capital funding would be very tight in future. This would put a renewed emphasis on the prioritisation of work and obtaining best value for money. Tenants and leaseholders would be kept fully informed of how this would affect them. It was still expected that all the housing stock would reach the Government's standard of decency by 2013.

Homes for Haringey had recently commissioned consultants to survey the remaining properties to ascertain the work required so as to be able to determine future priorities. It was proposed to retain the existing contractors up to year 4 of the programme (20/11/12), then to re-tender. Significant savings had been agreed with the current contractors without reducing quality objectives.

Good progress had been achieved in minimising the number of no access/refusals which was always a significant problem in a programme such as for decent homes. Mr Kemp, the Chair asked whether the reduced funding would result in a reduction of soft landscaping and other minor estate works. Mr Maddison agreed and said that it would also mean more one-off repairs rather than cyclical maintenance programmes, repair rather than replacement and so on. It would of course be important to work with the residents to ensure the most important priorities are dealt with first.

Referring to the results of the satisfaction surveys he noted that the results for leaseholders and tenants were now recorded separately. The satisfaction levels for tenants were very high and the rate of return was quite high. Leaseholder satisfaction was lower and also the rate of return was relatively quite low. Ms Merrick complained that she had had to ask for a satisfaction form and to the best of her knowledge no leaseholder in her block had received one. Mr Maddison responded that he was very disappointed to hear this, but he said there was nothing to prevent Homes for Haringey from issuing forms subsequently to those who had not received them.

In response to another question Mr Maddison said that if a tenant had replaced their kitchen and it was still in good condition, Homes for Haringey would not replace it. A Panel Member referred to the case of a fairly elderly tenant who appeared to be living in very substandard conditions but who had refused to have any work done. Mr Maddison said that the landlord could only insist on work being done which had safety implications such as electrical re-wiring. However it was also the responsibility of the Tenancy Management Officer to ascertain the position and recommend action as appropriate.

Ms Rawitzer asked to know what works were covered by the Decent Homes Programme. Mr Maddison replied that it covered everything of a planned maintenance nature including controlled entry systems. Where the windows

were beyond economic repair they would have to be replaced as part of the programme. Day to day repairs were dealt with separately under a separate budget managed by Martin Hoctor, Repairs Client Manager.

Mr Lawrence raised the question as to why it was necessary to place a number of different cables in different sets of trunking through the living room of his flat, this had resulted in 5 separately trunked cables on his living room ceiling. Mr Maddison said that trunking has to be used, since if cables were in-set into the walls this generally required re-plastering and redecoration which added greatly to the cost.

Ms Goodhew referred to the high rates of satisfaction, in particular the fact that there was 100 per cent satisfaction recorded from the returns of the 13 leaseholders who had responded in South Tottenham – she questioned the credibility of these statistics. Mr Maddison answered that it was the object of the programme to address any significant issue while work was in progress. The satisfaction questionnaire was now returned by post.

Ms Brown noted that the response rate appeared to be quite low and said that the statistics should include the response rate for leaseholders and tenants. Mr Thevanesan said that it was unfortunately the case that there was usually a low response rate in the case of all questionnaires. This was a problem the Home Ownership Team had experienced as well.

Mr Maddison then turned to the subject of energy efficiency. He said that Homes for Haringey was currently working on developing an Energy Strategy over the next 6 months. In the first place, fuel economy was of great importance to most residents. It would also help to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The new energy policy would be based on the aims of being 'lean, clean and green'. It would be developed in conjunction with the survey he had previously mentioned of the housing stock. Priorities would probably be loft insulation, more efficient boilers (replacing G rated ones), draft proofing, jackets for hot water tanks and so on

Mr Patel raised the question as to whether the installation of roof-sited solar panels would be considered in view of the fact of the recent feed-in tariff which had been introduced by the Government. This provided a financial incentive he said for domestic and other consumers who installed wind turbines, solar panels, etc to generate their own electricity and to return their surplus to the national grid.

Mr Maddison said that this option would receive careful consideration. However the initial setup costs would be very high. The panel would have to be placed on top of a new or existing roof, which would affect the guarantee for the roof and possibly invalidate it. There would be maintenance problems. The panel would be quite vulnerable to damage from vandalism. Current systems relating to solar power, etc may superseded by much more efficient

systems in the near future on account of the rapid rate of development of this relatively young type of technology.

Mr Kemp raised the question as to whether residents would be consulted about these matters. Mr Maddison said that this would be essential and of course if there were significant opposition it would not be possible to give the go ahead. Ms Rawitzer asked how residents would benefit from the installation of solar panels. Mr Maddison agreed that this would pose a problem. It would have the potential to reduce the communal lighting costs for a block of flats, so leaseholders' charges could be reduced. Obviously the landlord would also receive a return for the investment.

Ms Rawitzer commented she understood that the Spanish government had recently cancelled a programme of this nature. Mr Patel defended the policy – it would be possible to find a company that would install the panels at no cost and pay for the use of the site. In answer to a question Mr Maddison said that as things stood Homes for Haringey did not insure its roofs against vandalism, etc. The cost would be extremely high and would be even greater if solar panels were installed.

A Panel Member asked about the insulation of the walls of the Council's properties – Mr Maddison said it would be difficult to insulate two thirds of the properties since they had solid walls. With respect to all policies of this nature it would be essential to avoid any unnecessary financial risks and to consult fully with residents whenever anything was proposed.

3. Outcomes of consultations with leaseholders about their experiences of Decent Homes works using customer journey mapping techniques – Kim Graves, Project Manager Business Improvement, Business Improvement Team

Ms Graves explained that customer journey mapping was a method of systematically analysing how customers interact with an organisation when they are receiving a service. She described how they had started the project by mapping out the steps from start to finish that a leaseholder goes through during the Decent Homes work. They had worked out the different types of experiences leaseholders would generally have had. They invited leaseholders from a number of different locations across the borough to attend focus groups. This was to obtain the views of leaseholders who had had work done under the programme.

A number of points emerged from these discussion groups. In particular leaseholders felt they should have as much notice as possible about the Council's plans for maintaining and improving its blocks of flats, so leaseholders could have a better idea about their future financial commitments. To address this matter, Homes for Haringey proposes to improve the flow of information to leaseholders about future works, their cost and the amount of notice given.

Another policy suggestion it was felt could help leaseholders would be to have an advance payment scheme. A suggestion that is being given careful consideration is to involve the Key Leaseholder Scheme in the monitoring of standards and the quality of work of the Decent Homes Programme. This would enable key leaseholders to take on a sort of advocate role for leaseholders with regard to major works. It had also been agreed to report leaseholders' satisfaction levels separately to those of tenants in relation to the Decent Homes Programme. This would enable Homes for Haringey to identify leaseholder concerns more quickly where necessary.

Ms Batzias expressed regret for the abandonment of the sinking fund scheme which she believed had been on account of a legal challenge. Mr Thevanesan replied that it had not been a sinking fund since there is no provision for this in the lease. However she was right that there had been a policy of charging payments in advance and this had been discontinued for administrative reasons, though it was clearly allowed for in the lease. Ms Brown said she objected to this type of scheme on the grounds that no interest was payable on the funds held on behalf of leaseholders. Mr Thevanesan said that the payment of interest would incur very high administrative costs which would offset any possible gain to leaseholders.

Ms Brown raised the point that since none of the work on her estate had been communal (it had all been internal to tenants' flats), she had received no information about what work was proposed. However she had experienced a great deal of inconvenience on account of the volume of noise generated in an adjacent flat (a tenant's) when the kitchen had been replaced. Furthermore she had not been asked her opinion (through completing a satisfaction questionnaire) on the way the work was carried out. Ms Graves agreed that this was an issue that should be looked into.

4. The Concierge Service – its main functions and the work it undertakes – Sean Gardiner, Team Leader, Broad Water Farm.

Mr Gardiner commenced his talk by describing how the service is organised. The Concierge Service is part of the Tenancy Management Department. It is covered throughout the Borough by three teams:

- Broadwater Farm
- Wood Green
- Tottenham & Chettle Court

Each of these teams covers schemes situated at six different locations. The Concierge Shifts are as follows:

- o Monday –Friday
8 am - 4 pm & 4 pm -12 pm
- o Saturday
10 am to 6 pm & 6 pm – 2 am
- o Sunday (+ Bank Holidays)
Middle shift 12 noon to 8 PM

Mr Gardiner explained that the Concierge Service carried out the following functions:

- They welcome residents and visitors to the block
- They monitor the entrance to the building and deter unauthorised visitors
- Their presence improves security in the building and discourages vandalism (for instance to control entry systems)
- They report repairs, particularly in communal areas
- They support vulnerable residents
- They respond to emergencies
- They carry out customer care telephone surveys.

With regard to their security duties they monitor CCTV cameras which are present in all the lifts in these blocks. They generally get to know any vulnerable residents in the building and can obtain help for them if necessary. The customer surveys are for tenants who have recently had internal repairs – if they report there are problems outstanding these are referred to the Repairs Service.

Mr Gardiner said that costs to leaseholders were worked out on the basis of the cost for each block apportioned amongst the total number of properties in the building. This resulted in service charges of between £400 and £1300 per annum. At the moment Homes for Haringey was considering ways of maximising the services to residents provided by Concierge Officers. Some proposals were as follows

- o Walking around the building/estate at the start of each shift to check that everything is alright
- o Attending welcome visits for new residents with the Tenancy Management Officer
- o Attending estate inspections & residents meetings
- o Keeping more detailed records of service failures in the building
- o Reporting new (unauthorised) satellite dishes so that they can be removed as soon as possible.

In addition to these fairly formal duties it should be noted he said that Concierge Officers generally act as sources of local information for residents – answering questions on a variety of different subjects, such as proposed works and so on. Ms Brown said that the charges to leaseholders were often too high, she believed they should be averaged across the borough. Mr Thevanesan replied that this would not really be possible since it would be susceptible to legal challenge from a leaseholder whose charges had increased as a result of the change in policy.

Mr Lawrence questioned the efficacy of the service, he believed that the CCTV cameras for quite a large number of blocks could be monitored from one central point, thus resulting in considerable cost savings. Mr Gardiner responded that this had been done where it was feasible, that is where blocks of flats were fairly close together. If you ask someone to monitor a large number of screens, it becomes very difficult to do properly, since it is then very monotonous work and it is very difficult for anyone to do such work 7 hours a day every day. Furthermore from his own experience he believed that the setting up of the concierge service had resulted in considerably reduced levels of anti-social behaviour, drug dealing and so on.

5. Report from the Core Group – Roger Kemp, Chair of the Leasehold Panel. Mr Kemp informed the Panel that there had been no meeting since the last meeting of the Panel, but there would be one in November.

6. Report from the Key Leaseholder Subgroup – Ian Lush, Chair of Subgroup.

Mr Lush submitted a written report. He said that the first meeting of the new subgroup took place at the beginning of November. It had elected him as the Chair and Mr Nick Claxton as Deputy Chair. The meeting had agreed that its focus should be on repairs and issues around how they are reported, monitored, undertaken, costed and charged to leaseholders. Other more general issues would continue to be dealt with by the Leasehold Panel.

There were now over 500 Key Leaseholders who had volunteered for the scheme with virtually every estate covered. The meeting had also considered post-inspection reporting. The next meeting he said would focus in particular on insurance issues and would be attended by Trudie Eagle, the Insurance Manager, Haringey Council.

7. Results of the Inspection carried out by the Audit Commission – Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership.

Mr Thevanesan reported that it had been a very satisfactory result, with Homes for Haringey achieving a two star rating, that is, a good service that has promising prospects for improvement. The leasehold management services provided by the Home Ownership Team had been commented on very favourably.

In particular the Inspectors had noted the good range of useful information available to leaseholders and the fact they are actively involved in shaping the service. They found that performance against service standards was good. They considered that service charge estimates and bills are clear and accurate and the collection of charges was good. Leaseholders they said have a range of flexible payment options and support with financial difficulties.

On the minus side they said that leaseholder satisfaction was low, and there is limited understanding of individual needs (on account of the relatively low rate of return of customer profiling forms). Mr Thevanesan said that the Home Ownership Team is working with members of the Key Leaseholders Scheme to improve leaseholder satisfaction and expand resident involvement in our services. They were also considering how to improve the rate of return for customer profile questionnaires. He said that there would be a short report in *Leaseholder News* about the Audit Commission Report.

8. Minutes of the meeting of the 7 October.

Ms Brown said that her views had not been correctly recorded in relation to the suspension of Haringey Leaseholders' Association. She had said that Homes for Haringey has no right to carry out an investigation into the HLA since it is an independent organisation and has not applied for recognition this year. The HLA resents this interference into its affairs she said. Leaseholders will be sent information in the post about the general meeting it proposes to hold in December.

The minutes were then agreed as a true record

9. Forward agenda proposals

No points were raised in relation to these matters.

10. Proposal by Haringey Council for the micro chipping of dogs to improve ease of identification – Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership.

Mr Thevanesan explained that the Council was considering introducing a policy to facilitate the injecting of micro chips into dogs, if requested by the owners. There would be a charge for the service.

He understood that some other London boroughs had introduced this type of policy, for example Wandsworth and Hammersmith and Fulham.

Mrs Goodhew said it sounded a good idea. Ms Brown asked how much the charge would be. Mr Thevanesan replied that the actual charge had not yet been worked out but it could not be less than £15. Mr Lawrence said that it was more important that dogs in public places should be on a lead and muzzled since dogs could constitute a hazard both to members of the public and to other dogs and their owners. Identification was a matter of convenience to the owner rather than that of improving public safety. Ms Batzias commented that in Australia it was compulsory for all dogs to carry the identity of their owners.

11. Any other business.

The questionnaire *Have your say – Haringey*

Mr Nicholas explained that the Council was circulating a questionnaire for people to express their views on the priorities for the Council's services. A copy had been provided to all attendees. He said that if Panel Members would like to complete it, they should return it to the Council at the address given on the form by the 3rd December (now the 17 December) or via the Council's website.

Reporting leakage

Miss Merrick referred to a problem of long term seepage of water into her flat which had caused considerable damage to a number of rooms. Although Zurich Municipal was planning to carry out remedial works, the problem was still ongoing. When she had raised the matter recently with the Home Ownership Team, she had been told that it was not really their responsibility. Mr Thevanesan replied that this did not represent the policy of the Home Ownership Team as was borne out by the fact that Miss Merrick was receiving ongoing assistance from another member of the team. He said he would investigate the matter and report back to the Panel.

Mr Kemp thanked the guest speakers for their very interesting talks. He then closed the meeting.