

**Documents for the Leasehold Panel meeting,
16 March 2011**

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Leasehold Panel

Minutes of the meeting, 16 March 2011.

Attendance: Mr S & Mrs M Barua, Ms M Danielle-Dessent, Mr B Nazarian, Mrs Shirley Perlman, Mr Ronald Dalliday, Mr Paresh Patel, Mrs Delsie Grandson, Mr Victor Hines, Miss Nichole Carpenter, Mr Peter Gilbert, Mr Martin Laheen, Ms Anne Gibson, Mr Ismet Patel, Mr Nikola Ignjatovic, Ms Belinda Batten, Mrs M Shaw, Ms Mary Rawitzer, Mr D Evans, Ms M Mboizi, Mr Piers Johnson, Ms Sue Brown, Mrs Anne Goodhew (Vice Chair of the Leasehold Panel), Mrs R Batzias, Mr Roger Kemp (Chair of the Leasehold Panel) (25)

Apologies: Ms Alena Breckova, Mr Ian Lush

Chair: Mr Roger Kemp.

Officers: Ms Joy Walton, Performance and Business Planning Manager, Mr Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership, Ms Arshi Zaman, Manager Projects Team, Mr Nick Claxton, Senior Home Ownership Officer who took the minutes.

1. **Update on email strategy** – Nick Claxton, Senior Home Ownership Officer.

Mr Claxton explained that, as part of the Home Ownership Team's ongoing communication strategy, the notice for the meeting had been sent to approximately 1,200 email subscribers, rather than just the 87 leaseholders currently on the Leasehold Panel email distribution list.

He explained that the email subscription service had proved extremely effective, as it allowed the Home Ownership Team to contact a wider number of customers, while existing services for non-internet users also benefited from the use of cheaper and more time effective processes.

Home Ownership are currently running promotions he said to all leaseholders who do not subscribe, or have not provided an email address. This offers a £10 discount on their annual service charge for the

first year of their subscription if they respond to the flyer/email within a fixed period.

Mr Thevanesan added that the Home Ownership Team proposes to set up a leaseholder blog in order to capture feedback on a variety of issues from a broader range of leaseholders, including those who reside abroad.

Mr Claxton tabled a report on the email strategy, (see Appendix 1 to the minutes). He invited leaseholders wishing to comment to contact him on 020 8489 3021 or email nick.claxton@homesforharingey.org.

2. Going local: Landlords and residents working together to raise standards – Leaseholder Services Standards – Joy Walton, Performance and Business Planning Manager and Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership – joint report (Appendix 2).

Ms Walton introduced the joint report. She began by explaining that the purpose of her team was to ensure that Homes for Haringey met the requirements of the regulator, currently the Tenants Services Authority (the TSA). The Government had announced the abolition of the Audit Commission (to take place in 2012/13). She said this meant that Homes for Haringey would not be subject to the same kind of audit inspection again. Under the arrangements set up by the TSA, Homes for Haringey was now a “co-regulatory” organisation working with residents to ensure the quality of its services.

Referring to the report (*Going local* – see Appendix 2, Ms Walton informed the Panel that it contained the service standards of the services provided by the Home Ownership Team (referred to by the TSA as the “local offer”). She explained that under the new requirements the service standards should now be agreed in consultation with residents. To date consultation had already taken place with regard to the service standards (local offers) for Tenancy Management, Estate Services and Repairs.

Ms Danielle-Dessent commented that the local offer for the Home Ownership Team seemed rather vague, and that she would like to see a “point scoring” system introduced for the calculation of service charges. She also said that she liked the complaints procedure as she had always found it very effective. Ms Walton advised the Panel that the Feedback Team had recently revised the complaints procedure so that it had now become a two track system.

The first track she said is now called the “quick fix” track. This relates mainly to fairly straightforward issues which the customer usually wants to

be resolved as soon as possible without a review of the procedures, etc. The second track consists of a "service investigation" procedure which puts the emphasis on an investigation into possible failings in the service. The customer is offered a choice between the two tracks.

Ms Carpenter asked when this would be put into effect. Ms Walton advised her that the new system was now in place (officially starting from the 1 April). She explained that it would be subject to continual review and any suggestions about it should be passed to the Feedback Team. Mrs Batzias asked for clarification that the 10 day response time for queries meant 10 working days. Mr Thevanesan advised that it can be up to 14 days including weekends.

Mr Thevanesan said he wanted to consult Panel Members about the service standards contained in the local offer from the Home Ownership Team. He explained that they start to apply when a leaseholder first purchases their property. Thus new leaseholders can attend Leaseholder Inductions which are held regularly, either in groups or individually. Home visits are available for those requiring them, although there was very little uptake of either option he said. He reported that the *Welcome Pack* was constantly being revised and improved, and that the Home Ownership Team was also considering producing a short DVD to send to new leaseholders.

Mr Thevanesan also informed the Panel that the Home Ownership Team would be running several courses, including one on leaseholders' rights, and another on useful sources of information on the internet, and that details of these courses would be in the next Leaseholder News. He said that the Home Ownership Team makes a point of sending the invoices for the Estimated and Actual Service Charges well in advance of their due date in order to allow more time for leaseholders to decide on their payment arrangements.

Mr Thevanesan detailed a number of ways residents can get involved, including the Leasehold Panel, the Key Leaseholder Scheme and the Leaseholder Forum, which are all chaired by leaseholders. As part of the local offer Mr Thevanesan said that the Home Ownership Team proposes to attend some meetings of Residents' Associations if they are invited to do so. Mrs Goodhew asked whether this could result in additional expense, but Mr Thevanesan stated that no expansion of the Home Ownership team would be required and that the officer time would be paid for from savings elsewhere. He said that the larger estates would be targeted first.

Responding to a question as to whether Section 20 Notice matters came under this umbrella Mr Thevanesan advised the Panel that these were governed by legislation and, given that it was a specific legal

requirement, it would not be included in the ongoing consultation relating to the Home Ownership Team's local offer.

There was a discussion regarding the timescales for observations to Section 20 notices to be submitted, which is 30 days. This was felt by some leaseholders to be too short, with only the expensive alternative of the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal. Mr Thevanesan advised that mediation was an inexpensive alternative to the LVT. The Panel requested more information regarding this. Mr Thevanesan also advised that the LVT fees were on a scale up to £350 and that leaseholders required no legal representation to undertake this process.

❖ **ACTION point:** NT to provide information of the mediation process at a future meeting.

3. Service Excellence – The best channels of communication for residents, finding efficiency savings and protecting services – Arshi Zaman, Manager, Projects Team

Ms Zaman gave a presentation to inform Panel Members about the programme and to give them the opportunity for feedback. She explained that the main aim of the Service Excellence programme was to ensure a secure basis for future service provision. The guiding principles were that there should be a fully modernised organisation working with residents to deliver efficient services and aiming to get things right first time.

The emphasis would be to achieve resident access to our services in new ways which are more convenient for them and more cost effective for Homes for Haringey/Haringey Council. This will also help Homes for Haringey target resources to those most in need. This had become particularly relevant in view of the current financial environment, though the search for greater efficiency was always relevant. It also provided a good opportunity to review the effectiveness of current methods and find new ways of improving service delivery

Ms Zaman said the main considerations were:

- Protecting and improving what the customer gets and frontline services
- At the same time it was absolutely necessary to find savings in the ways in which Homes for Haringey operates its services.

She explained that the main ways of achieving savings were the following options:

- Internal changes to how staff work and where they are located. This will help Homes for Haringey reduce the very high costs of accommodation.
- Making customers more aware of often more convenient ways of obtaining services and information e.g. web/text/self service options
- There would still be the option of meeting staff face to face but it had to be recognised that this is the most expensive method of service delivery. Given that money is now so scarce she said it was indisputable that Homes for Haringey needed to direct resources even more carefully.
- Ms Zaman drew attention to the high call volumes (roughly 27 calls a year from each property). She explained that this demonstrated an urgent need to see how Homes for Haringey can get it right first time /do it differently to reduce the number of phone calls. A good example of this was where people still ring up to pay rent when there are more convenient and more cost effective alternatives.
- She said that these issues needed to be taken on board as part of the dialogue with residents about 'Local Offers'. Subsequently the service standards would of course be subject to inspection (by the Tenants Services Authority or its replacement).

Ms Zaman explained that an integral part of the Service Excellence Programme was to consult with the residents. The following methods of consultation would be used:

- A questionnaire
- Focus groups
- Feedback from residents

She said that the questionnaire would shortly be sent out to 5,000 residents chosen at random, divided between tenants and leaseholders in proportion to their numbers in the borough. The questionnaire would be designed to assess the current service levels and services residents utilise or need. This would help identify services that need to be enhanced and also where services can be streamlined or channelled more effectively. Homes for Haringey would carefully analyse the results and report back to residents on the findings.

Ms Zaman summarised the next steps as follows:

- Look at the options available, including using new technology
- Draft proposals to the Board in May

Some Members of the Panel queried whether or not the trend towards electronic means of bill payment, communications, repairs reporting and so on would make it less easy for non-users of computers to access services. Ms Zaman said that the options for contacting Homes for Haringey by phone or by personal visit would continue. However for many people other the alternatives such as email, the web, automated telephone service and so on.

Ms Zaman explained that the closure of two customer service centres was being considered (in view of their high costs), and that alternative locations or methods of delivery were being looked at. The questionnaire was designed to help identify the best and most cost effective alternatives. All services would continue to be contactable on the phone. Ms Zaman confirmed that all resident feedback on these matters would be taken into account.

4. Report from the Core Group – Roger Kemp, Chair of the Leasehold Panel

As Mr Kemp did not have a copy of the report with him it was agreed that he would provide a copy to Mrs Goodhew, Vice Chair for her to present at the next meeting.

5. Report from the Board and the annual conference of the Chartered Institute of Housing – Ms Alena Breckova, Leasehold Board Member

Due to the absence of Ms Breckova, who sent her apologies, this item was deferred to the next meeting.

6. Report from the Resident Scrutiny Panel Working Group – Mrs Anne Goodhew, Vice Chair.

Mrs Goodhew reported that the Working Group had been meeting intermittently since August 2010, and that Ms Sue Brown and Mr Peter Gilbert were also attending this group. Mrs Goodhew felt that progress had been rather slow, and that a somewhat curtailed deadline had been set for this May for the establishment of the Scrutiny Panel.

Mr Gilbert commented that it appeared rather doubtful whether Homes for Haringey would be able to provide sufficient resources for the proper functioning of the Scrutiny Panel. Furthermore a lot of the relevant issues had only recently been identified. In response Mr Thevanesan said that since this fell within the remit of the Resident Involvement team he was unable to comment.

Mrs Goodhew and Ms Brown stated that they felt, if implemented properly the Scrutiny Panel would be a good thing, and confirmed that it would only scrutinise Homes for Haringey and not Haringey Council. Ms Danielle-Dessent enquired as to whether the Section 20 procedures would fall within the remit of the Scrutiny Panel and Ms Brown advised that she did not think so. Mr Thevanesan confirmed that this would not be covered, since compliance with the regulations was a legal requirement.

Ms Zilkha queried whether the number of leaseholders on the Scrutiny Panel would be proportionate to the number of tenants. Mrs Goodhew agreed to report back on this point in due course.

7. Outcome of consultation on the proposal to introduce an advance payments policy – Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership.

Mr Thevanesan advised the Panel that, after extensive consultation, the policy would not be pursued at this time due to the current economic climate, and the number of leaseholders already paying large major works bills.

8. Minutes of the meeting of 2 February 2011

Ms Danielle-Dessent said that her comments regarding the introduction of a "point scoring" system for the calculation of service charges had not been minuted, and that Ms Breckova's agreement with the proposal of a middle band management fee had also not been included. Mr Thevanesan agreed to respond in writing to Ms Danielle-Dessent's proposal for a "point scoring" system of calculation.

The progress of the training of Tenancy Management Officers on insurance claims was queried, but Mr Thevanesan advised that this was being progressed through the Key Leaseholders Scheme, and that an update would be given at the next meeting by the Chair of that group. He went on to clarify the remit of the Key Leaseholders, which is primarily concerned with issues relating to communal repairs.

Ms Brown said the minutes did not accurately reflect her view that leaseholders were affected when works were carried out inside tenanted properties. Leaseholders should be allowed to comment on the conduct of contractors, even if all the work was internal to tenants' flats.

9. Forward items

The following items were requested:

- a presentation on the mediation process as an alternative to the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal, as raised under item 2 above.
- a presentation on changes to the Decent Homes funding and its impact on leaseholders
- a talk from Mr Thevanesan on the calculation of the Actual Service Charge and the impact of day-to-day repairs charges on these
- the removal of hazardous asbestos materials and the cost of this work to leaseholders.

10. Any other business

Ms Zilkha queried the costs of the different IRS options and asked what the charge would be for a system offering Sky TV on its own. Mr Thevanesan agreed to provide some information on this. He also advised the Panel that individual residents would be charged for the removal of any dishes they installed without landlord permission.

Concern was raised over the recent Notice of Intention to enter into a Long Term Agreement with regard to consultancy services since Panel Members had understood that Decent Homes funding had been partially suspended. Mr Thevanesan advised that 2 years' worth of funding was still available, as well as other capital funding. He advised that £20 million was still being spent on the housing stock, and that a new capital programme would commence in 2013. After the end of the Decent Homes funding, the necessity for capital schemes would be ongoing.

A query was raised as to why the payment period for the digital IRS was so short compared to that for tenants. Mr Thevanesan advised that leaseholders had 5 months to pay these bills which, which was in accordance with the normal period for this amount of service charge. Furthermore since the cost of the work had been capped at £400, it was cheaper for leaseholders if the cost of the work was included as an item in the Actual Service Charges rather issuing separate Section 20 Notices. Thus leaseholders were saved having to pay a separate management fee.

The Chair then announced his resignation from the Chair, as he was leaving the borough. Mr Thevanesan thanked Mr Kemp for the substantial contribution he had made to the Leasehold Panel since first being elected Chair in 2009. Panel Members also expressed their appreciation.

The Chair then invited candidates for the Chair and for the representative on the Core Group to send their nominations to Mr Thevanesan, or Mr Bruce Nicholas.

The Chair thanked the guest speakers for their very interesting presentations and he then closed the meeting.

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APPENDIX 1

Home Ownership Team – Communication Strategy, March 2011

Background

In October 2008 the Home Ownership Team launched its' email subscription service in response to the demand from leaseholders to reduce hard copy output and, therefore, the running costs of HOT.

As at 16 March 2011 1,280 leaseholders have subscribed to receive Leaseholder News and other general mailouts via email, and each receives a £5 credit on their day-to-day service charge account for each year they remain subscribed. Generally leaseholders only unsubscribe when they sell their property.

The service has also been used to trial notifications when Estimated Service Charges, Actual Service Charges and Letters Before Legal Action are sent out.

The Home Ownership Team does not share leaseholders' email address with any party outside of Homes for Haringey, but will share this information with Tenancy Management if they need to contact the leaseholder in a case of emergency.

1) Ways of attracting new leaseholders

a. One-off incentive for new leaseholders to subscribe.

The Home Ownership Team aims to sign new leaseholders up to the service as soon as they have bought their property. Subscription forms are sent with all welcome packs. The incentive for new leaseholders will be raised to £10 for the first year, dropping to £5 per year for each subsequent year they remain subscribed. Existing subscribers continue to receive £5.

b. Promoting the service

HOT are currently running a promotion where all leaseholders for whom HOT do not hold an email address are being sent a letter, with a reply slip and envelope, offering them an initial £10 discount (followed by £5 for each subsequent year they remain subscribed) if they return the slip by 1st April 2011. This is also being offered via email to leaseholders who have given us an email address but have not yet subscribed (see point C below).

c. Special mail outs targeting non-subscribers

Non-subscribers will be targeted at regular intervals (3 months) with an email offering subscription service. All the leaseholder has to do to become a subscriber is reply. When this exercise was carried out in November 2010 62 more leaseholders responded asking to subscribe.

d. Capture email addresses when leaseholders call our office for queries

HOT officers dealing with telephone queries will offer an email response to the leaseholder as this is a quicker method of delivery. If appropriate to the conversation HOT officers will offer subscription service and forward any addresses to be added to the distribution list to the lead officer. Any email addresses obtained where it has not been appropriate to offer this service at that time will be added to the database and included in subsequent email solicitations to non-subscribers. Between 1st March and 1st April a discount of £10 for the year 2011/2012 is being offered, as per the promotions running parallel to this.

2) Future email out to include

e. Newsletters

Leaseholder News and Homes Zone will continue to be sent quarterly via email to all subscribers.

f. Invitations to meetings

Notifications of Leasehold Panel meetings are sent to all members of the panel prior to meetings. Going forward emails will be sent to all subscribers once minutes are published to increase greater leaseholder awareness of the Panel and current leaseholder issues. These emails will also invite leaseholders to join the panel. Any taking up that offer will then be included in mailouts notifying them of forthcoming meetings.

g. Statement of accounts

HOT have been working with SAP and are now able to email statements of account directly to leaseholders. HOT proposes to send these twice yearly, once when the Estimated Service Charge is issued and again when the Actual Service Charge is issued. Statements will continue to be available on request throughout the year.

h. Invoice

The SAP system now has functionality to send invoices via email, and HOT would like to trial this for leaseholders. Initially this will be solely for invoices relating to day-to-day service charges. If this trial proves successful then it can be expanded to include Major Works invoices.

i. Recovery letters including Letters Before Legal Action

A trial was conducted in 2009 to ascertain whether sending Letters Before Legal Action was a viable method of debt recovery. It proved successful, with the majority of leaseholders contacted contacting HOT to pay or make an arrangement to pay. HOT will adopt this practice and extend it to reminder letters prior to legal action which subscribers will receive by email.

j. Promotions

The email subscription service also enables HOT to promote services and events such as the gas services available to leaseholders, and the Leaseholders Forum. HOT also aims to increase promotion of resident involvement activities and community engagement.

3) Cost effective method of consultation/receive feedback from a wider audience

k. Establish a blog

Blogging has become a highly popular way of communicating. The Chief Executive of Homes for Haringey currently posts an internal blog for staff, giving them an opportunity to comment. The Chief Executive of Haringey Council has recently launched a similar blog, which is open to the public.

The current IT recommendation is to set up a blog using an external site. HOT and HfH Communications propose to establish a specific Leaseholder Blog, which will be written and administered by Home Ownership Officers, for an initial six month trial, to ascertain it's validity as a source of customer feedback.

Email subscribers will receive an email notice advising them of any new posting by HOT, providing a link to the webpage where they can read posts and post comments.

I. Establish code of conduct for users

No registration will be needed for leaseholders to post their comments, and the option to submit views anonymously will be available. While there is no requirement to register users who agree to terms and conditions of use, there is a need for the blog to be moderated, and this will be done by a HOT officer.

In order that inappropriate or offensive comments do not appear on the blog all comments will be subject to approval by the moderator before they are published. While this is standard practice, HOT aims to adopt a more flexible editorial policy and will seek to omit or reword offensive phrases from posts where the content is otherwise publishable. It is hoped that this will discourage abuse, and encourage leaseholders that their views, positive or negative, will be noted and published as long as the content is appropriate.

m. Issues that could be extended for discussion

The blog is ideal for reinforcing announcements regarding every area of Home Ownership's business. It will be stressed, however, that comments posted on the blog can not take the place of formal observations, particularly in respect of Section 20 matters, which are governed by legislation.

HOT would like to propose that blog entries are not solely written by HOT officers, and to offer the opportunity for leaseholders themselves to contribute, particularly those who have strong involvement with the Board, the Leasehold Panel and the Key Leaseholders. It is considered that this would be a strong example of resident involvement, and gives leaseholders the chance to hear from other leaseholders.

n. Ways of measuring feedback

After the initial 6 month trial has finished HOT will examine the volume and nature of feedback generated by the blog to assess its' value. If no feedback, or limited feedback has been received then HOT will consult the Leasehold Panel as to whether the blog should be discontinued.

If the feedback has been constructive, then analysis will be carried out to identify strengths and weaknesses with a view to developing the use of the blog.

4) SMS Text messaging

o. Recovery reminders

Many banks and other service providers now use SMS to notify customers of overdue bills. Homes for Haringey's rental income collection team have been trialling this method, and HOT are in discussion with them about their practices. HOT proposes to supplement the email subscription service with this additional service.

p. Meeting reminders

SMS can also be utilised to send reminders of forthcoming meetings to Key Leaseholders and members of the Leasehold Panel.

q. Promotions

SMS messaging would also supplement the email subscription service's promotion of services and events such as the gas services available to leaseholders, the Leaseholders Forum, and other resident involvement and community engagement activities.

Nick Claxton

Senior Home Ownership Officer

16 March 2011



Local Offer	Home Ownership Standards
Report Title	Going local: Landlords and residents working together to raise standards – Home Ownership Team
Reporting Officer, Team, Role and Contact Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Joy Walton, Performance and Business Planning Manager, 020 8489 1333 ➤ Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership, 0208 489 0000
Executive Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Rowann Limond, Executive Director of Finance ➤ Jackie Thomas, Executive Director of Housing Management
Meeting Description	Leasehold Panel
Meeting Date	16th March 2011
Agenda Item	2
Status of Report	Non-Confidential

1.0 Summary and background

A new 'Service Excellence' programme was launched in quarter 3 of 2010/11 to oversee service improvements across the business with the aims of:

1. Developing a new cost effective property and operating model
2. Reducing both the number of customer contacts and the cost per contact without significantly reducing service
3. Maintaining regulator compliance.

1.1 Strand 3: Maintaining regulator compliance.

The third strand of the Service Excellence Programme is focussed on ensuring we maintain regulator compliance. We have already produced this year's annual report in line with the TSA guidelines. We have also analysed the new regulatory framework and assessed the implications for HfH.

This report explores a crucial part of the new framework which is the concept of "Local Offers".

2.0 The New Regulatory Framework

2.1 The TSA has published its regulatory framework for social housing that applies from 1 April 2010. Co-regulation is the name given to the TSA's new approach. The TSA defines co-regulation as, "*Robust self-regulation by the boards and councillors who govern the delivery of housing services, incorporating effective tenant involvement, subject to a backbone of regulation by the TSA.*"

2.2 National standards are set in the following areas:

National standard	Requirements
Tenant involvement and empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer service, choice and complaints • Involvement and empowerment • Understanding and responding to diverse needs of tenants
Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of accommodation • Repairs and maintenance
Tenancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocations • Rents* • Tenure
Neighbourhood and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbourhood management • Local area co-operation • Anti-social behaviour (ASB)
Value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value for Money
Governance and financial viability*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance • Financial viability

* Not applicable to councils

2.3 These national standards lay out clear outcomes, which the TSA wants to see all providers achieve. But a one-size-fits-all approach will not meet the varying needs of tenants up and down the country. So HfH will be expected to tailor our services according to the needs and priorities of our residents. This marks a big shift: we will have to ensure that we fully understand our residents' needs and will need to ensure that we are responding to them.

2.4 Local offers are at the heart of the new localism agenda and co-regulation. The TSA has always been clear that its new approach to regulation should not be a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach. Its model of co-operative regulation is all about landlords and tenants working together to design and deliver services to meet local needs.

2.5 What is local?

Each community has its own needs and aspirations. The TSA wants to encourage us to take these differences into account and tailor some of our service delivery according to the priorities of tenants. The TSA has not prescribed the content of the local offers, or provided a definition of the term 'local'. HfH will be expected to define both the content and boundary of local offers in consultation with tenants.

Local could mean a local authority boundary or alternatively it could mean a neighbourhood with significant characteristics, priorities or needs. Or tenants may wish to explore having services tailored by factors other than geography such as in relation to demographics (eg older tenants). We may also, having properly involved and consulted our tenants, decide not to have a local offer where tenants expressly do not want one.

2.6 The future of the TSA

Following a review of social housing governance in October 2010, the government announced the TSA is to be abolished. The role of the TSA will move to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). However, no changes are expected before mid 2011. The TSA has asked all social housing landlords to continue to focus on their six standards. They are carrying on their work on the local offers and the annual report as if nothing will change.

3.0 Consultation on Leasehold Management

3.1 The next section shows the HfH current offer. In the meeting, we will be discussing with Panel members what they think of the current offer and if and how they would like it to be changed or tailored further.

Homes for Haringey's current offer to our leaseholders:

Home Ownership – Service Standards

Homes for Haringey has service standards for each service and a Customer Agreement which applies to all our services. Here are the standards that are for the Home Ownership Team:

Our objectives are:

New Leaseholders

- To provide a comprehensive '**welcome pack**' including copies of our main booklets for leaseholders.
- Offer an introductory meeting for a group or on an individual basis

Annual service charges

Each year we send all leaseholders:

- schedules of the estimated and actual services charges in February and August respectively.
- two booklets each year – to explain the Estimated and Actual service charges
- detailed notes and breakdowns with the actual accounts.

Bills for major works

- We send a copy of our booklet *Paying for major works invoices* with the invoice. This gives full details of our payment options plus a lot of other useful information
- When the work is finished we will send the final account within three months. If we are unable to do this, we will write to say why.
- We send a breakdown of the costs with the final account which will show how the actual costs compare with the original estimate.
- We will provide a copy of the FENSA Certificate on request when we install new windows and doors. We will let leaseholders know the guarantee period for work such as a new roof.
- We include any repair work less than £250 in the annual actual account so leaseholders do not receive a separate charge for administration.

Payments options

- We provide leaseholders with flexible ways of paying their annual service charges and payment of major works bills through interest free instalment options

- We provide payment incentives for those who wish to pay in full.
- If a loan from a bank or building society is necessary to pay a major works bill, we offer up to six weeks to arrange this.
- If someone would like more information we will be glad to discuss the payment options on a one to one basis.
- For a leaseholder on a low income having payment problems, we can make an appointment for them to see the Citizens' Advice Bureau through a fast-track referral.

Enquiries

- We will respond to an enquiry about any leasehold matter within 10 working days, in a way that is clear and easy to understand, whether received by phone, letter or email.
- We will send an acknowledgement and respond to queries by email if they are sent to one of our email boxes.
- Where requested we can offer a suitable appointment with someone from the Home Ownership Team at Wood Green Customer Services. We offer home visits to vulnerable leaseholders.
- We provide a detailed statement of the transactions on someone's service charge account on request.
- We may agree to mediation where a dispute cannot be resolved through our complaints procedure.

Sign posting

- We suggest help and advice from organisations outside the Council, if we are unable to respond to a leaseholder's enquiry.

Communication

We provide up to date information regarding leasehold matters:

- in Leaseholder News which is included with Homes Zone (the magazine for all our residents).
- on the Homes for Haringey website including copies of all our booklets, back issues of Homes Zone, the minutes of the Leasehold Panel and our performance.
- We provide an annual incentive payment for those who opt to receive leasehold information by email.

Consultation

- We always consult our leaseholders more than we have to by law about any major work likely to cost them over £250.
- We consult about any new long-term agreement planned to last longer than 12 months.

- We write to every leaseholder at the beginning of the financial year, if their property is in the decent homes programme for that year to say what work is planned.
- We also publish information on our website about the work planned for each address.
- We let all residents living in the building know what is happening about the work through newsletters and a local meeting.
- Home Ownership officers will attend (on request) resident meetings about major works or arrange a home visit for someone who is very ill or disabled.
- We send all leaseholders (in the building) Section 20 Notices to provide details of the works and an estimate of the cost at least 30 days before the work starts.
- We ensure that any observations received in writing receive a full response within 21 days.
- If the cost of the work increases by more than 10% above the original estimate, we write to leaseholders to explain the reasons for the increase while the work is being carried out.
- After the work is finished we write to confirm that the work has been completed and about who to contact to report any faults during the 12-month defects liability period
- We ask leaseholders their views through satisfaction questionnaires.

Getting involved

- We consult the Leasehold Panel regularly (usually monthly) on performance, service delivery issues, new policies and any new long-term agreements.
- We ask leaseholders to chair the Leasehold Panel and Key Leaseholder Group.
- The Panel arranges meetings of the Leaseholders' Forum and all leaseholders receive an invitation
- We will attend local meetings organised by leaseholders.
- We involve leaseholders in the decisions we make, and report back on how their opinions have been taken into account
- The Key Leaseholders Scheme enables any leaseholder to see their repairs bills before they are finalised. Leaseholders can also opt to help inspect communal repairs to their blocks or estates, and provide feedback on Homes for Haringey's frontline customer services.
- The Sublet Group looks at ways of improving the information to leaseholders who let out their properties and also to their tenants
- We will offer appropriate support to any independent democratic organisation representing leaseholders in the borough.

Windows and doors

- We allow leaseholders to install their own windows and doors before our contractors start work on site.

Other services

- We will provide the necessary information if a leaseholder wishes to buy kitchen and bathroom fittings (at a discount) as supplied by our contractors under the decent homes programme – the contact details are the same as for windows and doors (above).
- We have now arranged a convenient way for leaseholders to have their gas appliances serviced including their boilers.

How you can help

Your understanding and cooperation helps us to help you and also assists us in keeping our costs down (and also your service charges). In particular you can help by:

- Keeping us up to date if any of your account details change – phone numbers, correspondence address and so on
- Treating our staff and other residents with courtesy and respect
- Not causing any nuisance to neighbours
- Not storing anything in the communal areas, such as prams or bikes – this can delay people getting out in the event of a fire.
- Disposing of rubbish properly by putting it in the bins in the refuse collection areas.
- Paying your service charges on time
- Keeping children and pets away from areas our staff or contractors are working in
- Informing us of any lack of service provision right away
- Reporting any incidents of vandalism or anti-social behaviour
- Informing your tenants (if you are subletting) of the rules that they need to observe in our blocks of flats and estates
- Undertaking gas servicing annually and providing a copy of the gas safety certificate to the Home Ownership Team (only those who are subletting)
- Participating in various aspects of our Key Leaseholders Scheme
- Reporting any dumped rubbish to your caretaker (if your block has one)
- Giving us your feedback about our services and if you want to make a complaint, providing as much information as you can
- Completing our survey forms – these help us to improve our services
- Reading our letters and newsletters so you know what is happening

Home Ownership Standards

- Attending estate meetings, taking part in estate walkabouts
- Joining a panel, getting involved.

Quite a lot of leaseholders (and tenants) give freely of their time and make a very valuable contribution, helping us to improve our services.