



Leasehold Panel

Minutes of the meeting, 7 Oct 2010

1. Attendance: Ms M C Merrick, Ms Z Klimczak, Mrs Anne Goodhew (Vice Chair), Mrs M Shaw, Mr B Hines, Mrs Millie Mboizi, Ms E Marshall, Ms Sue Brown (HLA Chair), Ms Mary Rawitzer, Mr Michael Ruggins, Mrs Susan Adewumi, Ms Alena Breckova (Board Member), Mrs Delsie Grandson, Mr John Quinn, Mrs Rita Batzias, Mr Ian Lush, Mr Martin Laheen, Mr M Pentol, Mrs. Shirley Perlman, Ms L Zilkha (HLA Treasurer), Mr P Patel, Mr A Sofroniou, Ms Christine Ibrahim, Mr Roger Kemp (Chair of the Leasehold Panel) (24)

Chair: Mr Kemp chaired the meeting.

Officers: Mr Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership, Zuned Ahmed, Tenancy Management Team Leader (Hornsey) and Mr Bruce Nicholas, Leasehold Project Officer who took the minutes.

2. Talk on the work of Tenancy Management. Zuned Ahmed, Tenancy Management Team Leader (Hornsey)

Mr Ahmed began by explaining the structure of housing management. He explained that under the Executive Director of Housing Management (Jackie Thomas) there are a number of departmental heads. There is a head of tenancy management for each area: West (Wood Green and Hornsey), North Tottenham and South Tottenham. There are Team Leaders in charge of each section under each head of department. The other departmental heads are for income collection, estate services and home ownership. The tenancy management teams deal with all aspects of the tenancy, such as tenancy enforcement, antisocial behaviour and so on.

They are also responsible for a number of other areas he said. They have a client role in relation to functions such as estate services, voids, lettings, and repairs, monitoring to ensure that the services are provided to the appropriate standards. They work very closely with other services, such as Estate Services, the Home Ownership Team, Asset Management and the Repairs Service. They co-ordinate and lead on estate walkabouts, which generally take place twice a year and councillors and residents are invited to attend. They act as

an advocate for tenants and leaseholders. They deal with general enquiries raised by residents and leaseholders or signpost them to the appropriate team. They engage in resident involvement activities. They manage the concierge services and supported housing.

The Tenancy Management Officers (TMOs) are the first point of contact for noise complaints for both tenants and leaseholders. They deal with the annual tenancy checks which help identify unauthorised occupants. They carry out investigations in cases where tenants have requested transfers to alternative accommodation and make recommendations in cases where they feel this is necessary. Where contractors (e.g. for gas maintenance) or the Repairs Service cannot gain access to undertake necessary work inside the property, the TMO liaises with the various offices to facilitate this. With regard to estate management requirements, Tenancy Management carries out inspections every month to check on repairs, grounds maintenance and so on.

The estate inspections or walkabouts are arranged by Tenancy Management. They also organise estate action days, which are held every so often to identify and discuss solutions for local problems – it is planned to hold more of them in future. The TMOs consult with the residents on the possibility of small improvements to their building and estate. They deal with other issues such as parking problems and can initiate controlled parking schemes if appropriate. The TMOs decide if it is necessary to undertake pest control treatment to a building: if they feel there is a problem they contact the Council's Pest Control Team and ask them to carry out an investigation/treatment.

They attend some meetings of residents associations. They take the lead if residents say they would like to set up a local residents' association. They meet with advocates where they represent residents on some estates. They hold local surgeries for tenants where they are unable to get to customer service centres. The TMOs arrange community events, they attend panels in the evenings such as safer neighbourhood panels.

Ms Zilkha asked with regard to communal areas, for instance on balconies, how does Tenancy Management ensure that they are used properly, e.g. not for storage of various items by tenants. Mr Ahmed replied that the TMOs carry out regular inspections, this is particularly important in relation to minimizing fire hazards. A pilot scheme has been set up for the removal of unauthorised items on landings, etc and it is going to be extended. Ms Zilkha responded that in some instances residents install their own gates on communal landings. Mr Ahmed replied that this is against the Council's policy and permission is never given for this to be done.

Ms Merrick asked how TMOs ensure that appropriate action is taken, for instance in relation to infestations of vermin. Mr Ahmed replied that the TMOs work closely with departments of Haringey Council. Mr Ruggins said that it

was sometimes difficult to know who was responsible if things did not get done. Mr Thevanesan explained that Homes for Haringey was currently implementing a customer relations management system. This will mean that all customers' (residents') queries are logged on the system when they write or call. This will mean that it will be much easier to keep track on what has been done about an issue, right from when it is first raised by the customer.

The question was raised about buggies or prams – it was felt that residents should not have to carry them up and down stairs. There should always be storage for them at ground level. Another Member of the Panel complained about a rubbish skip situated on a pavement. Mr Ahmed said that if residents felt there was a significant problem that was not being addressed in their building they could always get a petition together to demonstrate the strength of feeling. Ms Breckova felt that this should not be necessary. Ms Zilkha expressed the view that Homes for Haringey should be more proactive on issues such as dogs not under proper control, washing obstructing communal landings, and so on.

Mr Kemp thanked Mr Ahmed for his interesting talk.

3. Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Leasehold Panel

Mr Nicholas advised the Panel that 7 nominations had been received and they had all been for Mr Kemp as Chair and Mrs Goodhew as Vice Chair. They were then elected unopposed. Mr Thevanesan said he felt he was speaking on behalf all Panel Members when he said how much he appreciated the work they had undertaken over the last year. There was no doubt he said that they had contributed considerably to the successful functioning of the Panel. Panel Members joined with him in recording their thanks.

4. To note the election of the Chair of the Key Leaseholder Subgroup (Mr Ian Lush) and to receive a short report from Mr Lush.

Mr Kemp welcomed Mr Lush's election and called on him to say a few words. Mr Lush said that the Key Leaseholder Scheme was very important in monitoring and reporting on communal repairs. It has enabled leaseholders to challenge and discuss issues before repairs costs were finalised for inclusion on their service charge accounts. He said that there was now practically a leaseholder on every estate in the borough under the scheme, checking the repairs costs.

In addition 30 leaseholders were on the circulation list for the subgroup which ensured a good attendance at their quarterly meetings. The main objective of the scheme of course was to help ensure that repairs costs were fair and reasonable. He felt that most of those of those involved would agree that it was making good progress in this regard – he had recently raised an issue himself and could confirm that the schema was operating as intended. Anyone interested in joining up should contact Nick Claxton or Paul Cox.

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

He began his report by explaining that if door closers are needed on a particular front door, this will be covered by the Decent Homes programme. However leaseholders' extractor fans will not be replaced in their flats.

He referred to the fact that one of the payment options for the payment of major works allows leaseholders to pay large bill over a period of up to 5 years. This option has been introduced since the Decent Homes programme commenced and before the financial calculations were carried out in relation to the funding. It has meant that the new payment option will produce a certain shortfall in funding in relation to the amount which was originally expected to be available.

He said it was expected that years 5 and 6 of the programme would be affected by the central government October spending review. Homes for Haringey was discussing ways of reducing costs with the contractors. It was expected that this could be achieved without any reduction in standards on account of the increasingly competitive climate.

In answer to a question from the tenants' representative, **Yvonne Denny**, Peter Maddison, Head of Asset Management had said he would be happy to attend meetings of the Asset Management Panel, if invited.

It had been reported that the survey work for next year will take place before Christmas. It is hoped to start in November (2010). It is planned to have workshop with the contractors regarding key performance indicators in this month as well.

6. Consideration of the results of the Annual Participation Questionnaire (copy to be circulated at the meeting).

Mr Thevanesan led a discussion on this subject. Ms Breckova said she had not received a copy of the questionnaire and several other leaseholders said they had not received it either. Mr Thevanesan replied that in future he would make sure that the circulation list used by the Resident Involvement Team for Panel Members was fully updated before the questionnaire was sent out.

In the first place it was noted that a lot of those responding to the questionnaire had commented on the fact that owing in part to the efforts of Panel Members, the Council had decided on a scheme which was much more advantageous to leaseholders with regard to the charges for the new communal TV digital aerials. Some had also mentioned the considerable improvements to the payment options for major works, giving leaseholders

more than 5 years to pay the largest bills. This had been strongly argued for by Panel Members.

Regarding the suggestions for improvements made by the respondents, Mr Thevanesan said he noted that a number had requested that meetings be held on different days of the week to enable people with regular commitments to attend. Respondents had also complained about the occasion when the room had been rather cramped. In response to these matters a timetable had been drawn up so that the meetings would generally take place on different days of the week. The canteen had been requested for all meetings in future but unfortunately it was not always available.

Panel Members agreed with these proposals. Some said that the Panel was particularly important since they believed that leaseholders were not always treated equally with other residents. Mr Ruggins said that this was especially the case with the Repairs Service. Mr Thevanesan said that the customer care training arranged by the Home Ownership Team always made it clear that leaseholders had equal rights in respect of communal services to the residents. Mr Lush said that he had also found that some front line staff tended to be somewhat dismissive of issues raised by leaseholders.

Mr Thevanesan said that he was introducing the Leaseholder Champions scheme which would arrange for a member of staff to represent leaseholders' interests in each service department. Ms Breckova said that this was clearly necessary and Mrs Grandson agreed that leaseholders' problems tended to be overlooked. Mr Ruggins commented that the Repairs people were helpful but were often unable to do anything – it sometimes appeared that the system would not allow them to log repairs reported by leaseholders. Mr Thevanesan said that the key leaseholder scheme should help to raise the profile of communal repairs. Mrs Goodhew said that leaseholders were not freeholders but simply a type of tenant and this should be more clearly recognised. Mr Ruggins said he felt that it should be made clearer as to how the Feedback Team liaises with the Repairs Service. Mr Thevanesan replied that he believed that issues of this nature were currently under review.

7. Minutes of the meeting of the 15 September.

They were agreed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

8. Forward agenda proposals

Mrs Goodhew said she considered raised the question as to when there would be a discussion on the policy on estate improvement recharges (based on Campsbourne (bath tubs) & Chettle Ct (refurbishment of community services)). Mr Thevanesan replied that the matter was currently being looked into and he would schedule it in the near future.

9. Any other business.

Organisation of the structure of the Home Ownership Team (requested by the Leasehold Panel)

Mr Thevanesan circulated an organisation chart

Investigation into Haringey Leaseholders' Association

Mr Thevanesan announced that on 28 September 2010, Homes for Haringey had suspended its recognition of Haringey Leaseholders' Association pending an investigation. This investigation centres on apparent breaches of Homes for Haringey's minimum recognition criteria for umbrella organisations which we require any such organisations to comply with in order for them to be formally recognised as representing the views of our 4,500 leaseholders. Once completed, a report will go to the Homes for Haringey Board outlining the outcomes of the investigation. Homes for Haringey will advise its leaseholders of the Board's decision in due course.

He said that there could be no further discussion of the subject at the Leasehold Panel. Mr Ruggins asked what the reason was for this and Mr Kemp said he understood it was because it was effectively 'sub judice' as the issues were being looked at elsewhere and the Panel was not part of the decision-making or investigative process. Mr Ruggins said that this was completely spurious. Ms Brown objected to the Panel's discussion of the subject on the basis that Homes for Haringey has no right to carry out an investigation since the HLA is currently unrecognised.

Mr Kemp then closed the meeting.