



## Leasehold Panel

### Minutes of the meeting, 11 February 2010.

**1. Attendance:** Mr Roger Kemp (Chair of Leasehold Panel), Ms Lesley Ramm, Ms Linda Chrysostomou, Mrs Shirley Perlman, Mr Martin Laheen, Mrs Delsie Grandson, Mrs Catrina Zahoor, Ms Susanah Adewumi, Ms Y Thompson, Ms L Parris, Ms Rita Batzias, Ms Anne Crellin (Vice Chair of Leasehold Panel), Ms Alena Breckova (Vice Chair of Haringey Leaseholders Association), Mrs Anne Goodhew and Miss Millie Mboizi

Chair: Mr Roger Kemp chaired the meeting.

Apologies: Mr M Pentol,

Officers: Ms Bernadette Kennedy, Feedback Team Manager, Mr Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership Mr Michael Bester, Major Works Officer, Mr Nick Claxton, Senior Home Ownership Officer and Mr Bruce Nicholas, Leasehold Project Officer who took the minutes.

### **2. Homes for Haringey's Feedback Procedure – Bernadette Kennedy, Feedback Team Manager.**

Ms Kennedy began by saying that the purpose of her talk was to find out whether the Members of the Panel had any ideas or suggestions for improving the service. She then gave a short description of the way in which the service operates. Homes for Homes for Haringey would take any type of complaint in relation to its services. This included the following:

- About the repairs service – undue delay or a complaint about the quality of work and so on
- Service failure – where Homes for Haringey should have done something and failed to do so – cleaning, grass cutting and so on.

Homes for Haringey would take complaints over the phone, by email and from a third party. She said that they receive quite a lot of complaints. These were dealt with under the following stages:

Stage 0: this was the initial stage for routine complaints. It is an informal way of addressing issues which doesn't involve an investigation or any written response. If the matter can be resolved within 2 working days, then no further action is required.

Stage 1: local resolution. The complaint is dealt with by the team responsible for undertaking the service. An acknowledgement is sent within 2 working days. The policy is to investigate the complaint within 10 working days and the investigator then writes to the complainant with the outcome of the investigation.

Stage 2: service investigation. A senior manager will investigate and write to the customer within 25 days with their findings. If they are not able to meet this target, they will let the customer know. Some people have suggested that the period of 25 days is too long.

Stage 3: Independent review. If the complainant is still not happy after stage two of the complaints process, the complainant can then contact Haringey Council's Feedback and Information team.

Mrs Goodhew suggested that more publicity should be given as to how to make a complaint. She said that people sometimes make a complaint to the team concerned and no action follows. Mr Kemp felt that all complaints should be dealt with from a central point. Mrs Kennedy responded that all complaints were entered on a database which enabled progress to be monitored by the Feedback team.

Ms Ramm said that she had made complaints under stage, one two and three and had not received a response not even an acknowledgement. This partly explained why people had to go to councillors, the ombudsman and so on. Ms Crellin said she had also had the same experience. Mr Thevanesan said it appeared that it should be made clearer how to make a complaint and secondly that staff should be keep customers better informed as to what action was being taken.

Ms Zahoor said that the identity of the complainant should not be revealed to the officer concerned if it reflected badly on their performance. In her experience the name of the person making the complaint was made known to the officer to whom it related. It should be treated as being confidential especially if the complainant requested this. Ms Kennedy said that it was generally not possible to

investigate a complaint against a member of staff without revealing the identity of the complainant.

Ms Ramm said she could not understand why people's identities had to be disclosed. Mr Thevanesan pointed out that if the complaint was for instance about rudeness to a customer, then there would be no possibility of maintaining confidentiality. Ms Zahoor said that there should be a procedure for making complaints and maintaining confidentiality. Mr Kemp agreed – planning departments operated on this basis, otherwise very few breaches of planning regulations would be reported.

Mr Kemp thanked Ms Kennedy for her interesting talk.

### **3. Key Leaseholder scheme – update, Nick Claxton, Senior Home Ownership Officer.**

Mr Claxton said they had recently held the first meeting for key leaseholders and there had been a very useful discussion. There had been a good attendance and they would circulate the minutes shortly and they would be published on the website. He said that the Resident Involvement Team and the Repairs Surveyors would attend these meetings on a regular basis. He wanted to emphasize that people did not have to sign up to the **full** scheme in order to receive repairs reports for their building and estate.

Through leaseholders checking the repairs reports it was expected that it would be possible to pick up any queries or errors before the costs were included in leaseholders' actual accounts in August/September each year. This would improve the accuracy of the billing. He explained they planned to send out a periodic repairs report, even if no repairs had been carried out so people would know it had been issued.

There were now 20 full members and a further 75 who had asked to be put on the mailing list for repairs reports. These were to be sent out every 3 to 6 months. The first batch had been issued and 25 queries had been received about them, which were currently under investigation.

Key Leaseholders who had signed up to the scheme could if they wanted play a broader role, providing feedback on any issues arising in relation to the services, such as cleaning, lift maintenance, controlled entry, etc provided to their building or estate. Any information could then be passed to the Estate Services Manager or

the Tenancy Management Officer depending on the type of issue involved.

#### **4. Report on major works billing – Mike Bester, Major Works Lead Officer**

Mr Bester referred to the report he had circulated with the agenda (see Appendix). He drew attention to the following matters. It should be noted he said that some final accounts were taking longer than the commitment of three months contained in the service standard. It was possible that the service standard would have to be revised.

- **Action point.** Mr Bester said he would report back to the Panel on what would be a practical period of time (after the completion of the work) for the issue of the final accounts.

The question was raised as to whether the contractors are paid on completion or whether there is a performance bond. This would provide for a financial penalty if the contractor did not complete the work to the required specification, which would result in a reduction in the leaseholder's final account.

- **Action point.** Mr Bester said he would find out what the policy was in relation to these matters and report back to the Panel.

There was some discussion about the fact that the Planning Department had indicated they were generally not prepared to grant planning permission unless Homes for Haringey could confirm that it definitely intended to replace the existing windows with UPVC.

- **Action point.** Mr Bester said he would report back to the Panel on the question of planning permission in relation to leaseholders who wished to install their own windows.

In response to a question Mr Bester said that 14 leaseholders had installed or were about to install their own windows. Ms Breckova asked what number of leaseholders had applied to install their own windows but had been unable to proceed because they had obtained planning permission.

- **Action point.** Mr Bester said he would find out whether this information was available and report back to the Panel.

#### **5. Strategic Core Group – report back from acting representative of the Leasehold Panel** – Anne Goodhew, Vice Chair, Leasehold Panel.

Mrs Goodhew provided some information on the function and make-up of the Strategic Core Group. It consists of representatives from all the main stakeholders involved in the Decent Homes Programme. Thus it consists of representatives from the 4 constructor partners, the 4 compliance teams, the Director of Asset Management and one or two senior officers.

There is also one tenant representative and one leaseholder representative, nominated by their respective panels. Should there be any matter put to the vote, each representative has one vote and the matter is decided by the majority of votes cast.

#### **6. Strategic Core Group – election of the representative from the Leasehold Panel and the substitute.**

The Panel voted for Mr Kemp as the representative and Mrs Goodhew as the substitute.

Ms Zahoor asked whether the minutes of the Core Group could be circulated to Panel Members. Mrs Goodhew said she would find out.

#### **7. Finalisation of the arrangements for the Leasehold Forum, Saturday the 20 March 2010 – Bruce Nicholas, Leasehold Project Officer**

##### Condolences

Mr Thevanesan then had to leave the meeting on account of being informed of the death of his father. The Leasehold Panel decided to record their condolences to him and his family in respect of their sad loss.

##### Forum agenda

The Panel made the points as recorded below in relation to the draft agenda.

##### Question and answer session.

- They felt that the proposed time allocated of 35 minutes was too short and that it should be in the region of an hour. They said that the time allocated to other items (either the discussion groups or the talks) should be reduced to allow for this.
- Mrs Goodhew said that a reasonable amount of time should be allocated for questions from the floor, since people wouldn't know what questions to ask until they had heard the talks given by the Directors. This was agreed.

### Discussion Groups.

The following points were made in relation to the proposed discussion groups:

- o Action plan. It was considered that a lot of people would not understand what this topic was about. Mr Nicholas explained that the action plan it was going to be prepared from the survey results, in conjunction with the working group on this subject. Panel Members expressed the view that unless people had some information on this subject in advance of the meeting it would be difficult for them to make a meaningful contribution.
- o Cleaning. Panel Members emphasised that they wanted this subject covered. Mr Nicholas responded that it would come under the talk on Estate Services and Tenancy Management services. Also that issues in relation to anti social behaviour would be covered under this heading.
- o Concierge service. Panel Members said that they definitely wanted a discussion group on this subject. Mr Nicholas suggested it would be more appropriate to cover this topic in a meeting of the panel. However the Panel disagreed with this suggestion.

Letter of invitation to the Forum. It was felt that Panel Members should have a say in the contents of this letter. Mr Nicholas responded that any suggestions would be considered but since the letter was from Homes for Haringey, the final decisions on the matter would have to rest with the officers.

### **8. Forward plan.**

2 March 2010. It was agreed that the next meeting of the Panel (on the 2 March) would be mainly about the policy on digital conversion and that Jackie Thomas, Executive Director of Housing Management had kindly agreed to give a report on this subject. There would also be a short report on the subject of some proposed enhancements to the payment options.

15 April 2010. Ms Crellin proposed that the subject of administration charges should be placed on the agenda and this was agreed. It was also agreed to invite Larry Ainsworth to this meeting to give a report on progress on the Decent Homes Programme.

Mr Kemp then thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting



Homes for Haringey

## Appendix

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### Major works billing Decent Homes Year Two (2009/10)

#### 1.0 Section 20 and Invoicing

#### 1.1 Number of Decent Homes Section 20 Notices issued for Year Two

Area	Number of Leaseholders
Hornsey	109
North Tottenham	107
South Tottenham	207
Wood Green	22
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>445</b>

(350 leaseholders in Year One)

#### 1.2 Number of observations received in 09/10

Area	Number of Observations received & responded
Hornsey	27
North Tottenham	13
South Tottenham	25
Wood Green	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>75</b>

Under the Section 20 legislation, an observation has to be in writing and received within 30 days starting from the date of the Notice. The above figure includes observations received for all 09/10 major works schemes, not just Decent Homes.

### 1.3 Number of Decent Homes invoices issued for Year Two (to date)

Invoices for all blocks in Decent Homes Year Two where works had commenced were sent out on 11 September 2009. The total amount billed was £3,011,498.88. The average bill was £10,529.72. 127 of the 288 leaseholders are non-resident leaseholders.

The remainder will be invoiced in late February/early March 2010. From 2010/11 (Decent Homes Year Three), we are proposing to invoice on a biannual basis, using the March and September quarter dates as targets.

#### 1.3.1 Breakdown by Amount

Invoice	Properties
Less than £1000	29
£1000 - £2,499	19
£2,500 - £4,999	20
£5,000 - £7,499	29
£7,500 - £9,999	38
£10,000 - £14,999	74
£15,000 - £19,999	61
£20,000 - £30,000	16
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>286</b>

#### 1.3.2 Breakdown by Area

Area	Properties	Total
Hornsey	76	£795,193.88
North Tottenham	81	£966,962.56
South Tottenham	120	£1,223,839.98
Wood Green	9	£25,502.46

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>£3,011,498.88</b>
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#### 1.4 Total number of Decent Homes invoices issued to date

##### 1.4.1 Breakdown by Amount

<b>Invoice</b>	<b>Properties</b>
Less than £1000	91
£1000 - £2,499	36
£2,500 - £4,999	47
£5,000 - £7,499	54
£7,500 - £9,999	104
£10,000 - £14,999	150
£15,000 - £19,999	109
£20,000 - £30,000	38
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>629</b>

##### 1.4.2 Breakdown by Area

<b>Area</b>	<b>Properties</b>	<b>Total</b>
Hornsey	128	£1,443,858.35
North Tottenham	147	£1,513,585.91
South Tottenham	275	£2,715,079.74
Wood Green	79	£452,880.76
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>629</b>	<b>£6,125,404.76</b>

## 1.5 Drop-in Sessions

As well as the booklet *Paying for major works invoices* (Hard copy was sent out with each invoice and is also available online) and telephone support, HOT arranged two drop-in sessions, one on Thursday 17 September (7pm - 9pm) and Saturday 19 September (10am and 1pm). A flyer promoting these sessions was included with the invoice, and an email flyer was sent to leaseholders who have chosen to sign up for email notifications. Unfortunately, these were very poorly attended.

## 1.6 Take up of payment options to date

Payment Option	Applications (to date)
Full Payment with 5% discount	119
Interest-loan over 3 Years (Under £10,000)	281
Interest-loan over 3 Years (Over £10,000)	80
Mandatory Loan	5
Discretionary Loan*	15
Interest-only Loan / Deferred Loan*	0
Houseproud Loan*	1
Hardship Capping*	0

\*Before leaseholders are considered for these options, they are referred to the Citizens Advice Bureau, who will see if they can receive financial assistance from the Department of Work & Pensions. They are also able to help them decide which payment option is best suited to their needs.

## 2.0 Final Account Survey

A Home Ownership Team Major Works Satisfaction Survey has been sent with the final accounts for each scheme. To date, we have issued 201 surveys and received 21 returns (10.45% return rate).

- Over 75% of respondents said that they found the Home Ownership Team either “very helpful” or “fairly helpful” when they contacted them about their invoice.
- Nearly 30% said that they found their Section 20 Notice “fairly hard” or “very hard” to understand.
- Only 47% said that they found the payment options “very suitable” or “fairly suitable”.
- 60% said that they found the windows to be either “fairly poor” or “very poor” value for money.

### 3.0 Major Works Service Standards

- If the cost of work increases by more than 10% above the original estimate, we will inform you of the increase and the reason for it while the work is being carried out.

Due to poor communication between the compliance team and Homes for Haringey, there have been several schemes where we have not notified leaseholders in advance of the fact that the cost of works has increased beyond 10%.

To date, there are eight blocks where the final account has increased from the estimate by more than 10%. The average difference between estimated block cost and final account block cost is -5.54%.

- When the work is finished we will send you the final account within three months. If we are unable to do this, we will write to you to say why.

To date, none of the final accounts we have issued have been within three months of works finishing on site. We have also not kept leaseholders updated on the delay in final accounts. From discussions with Asset Management, it seems that three months is an unrealistic target.

### 4.0 Windows Permission

#### Number of windows permission application packs requested 09/10

Area	Number of application packs requested	Number of completed applications received
Hornsey	39	2
North Tottenham	22	1
South Tottenham	81	10
Wood Green	31	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>14</b>

Recent challenges we have encountered with this policy are:

- The blocks Albany Close and Culross Close were moved forward in the Decent Homes Programme from Year 4 to Year 2. Leaseholders were

given a period in which to apply for the works and carry them out. We have worked with leaseholders so that those leaseholders who were wishing to carry out their own works have been able to.

- Planning Permission is being denied for some leaseholders who are wanting to replace their windows with uPVC but are not in the upcoming Decent Homes Programme year. This appears to be particularly in the case where the current windows are metal framed.

We are currently working with the Planning Department on a solution to this problem.