



Leasehold Panel

Minutes of the meeting, 14 January 2010.

1. Attendance: Mrs Shirley Perlman, Mr Roger Kemp (Chair of the Leasehold Panel), Ms Rita Batzias, Ms Susanah Adewumi, Mrs Anne Goodhew (Vice Chair, Leasehold Panel), Ms Yvonne Thompson, Ms Alena Breckova (Vice Chair, HLA), Mr Charles Connolly, Ms Lynne Zilkha (Treasurer, HLA), Mr Martin Laheen, Ms Sarah Abbasi, Ms Odeshea Gordon, Mr R Phillips, Mrs P Phillips, Mr B Hines, Miss Mary Rawitzer, Mr Ron Dalliday, (17)

Chair: Mr Roger Kemp chaired the meeting.

Apologies: Mr M Pentol, Ms Marion Merrick, Ms Millie Mboizi, and Ms Lesley Ramm.

Officers: Mr Gwyn Davies, Deputy Director, Repairs Service, Mr Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership and Mr Bruce Nicholas, Leasehold Project Officer who took the minutes.

2. Proposed internal repairs service for leaseholders – Gwyn Davies, Deputy Director, Repairs Service

Mr Davies began his presentation by explaining that it was proposed to offer leaseholders a service to undertake chargeable works inside leaseholders' properties. The Direct Labour Organisation is a highly professional business, undertaking 50,000 pieces of work every year with a turnover of £16 million. The DLO won the contract in 2007 in competition with firms from the private sector. It employs 250 staff with two local depots. It is a leading provider of local apprenticeships.

It has glazing and joinery departments. It is fully accredited under NICEIC (for electrical work) and under *Gas Safe* (CORGI) for gas engineers. It has recently set up a fleet of new vans which are equipped to carry a large stock of spares to minimise visits to the depots. It provides services including emergency call-outs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. There is also a customer friendly call centre. It plans to bid for maintenance contracts with housing associations with properties in the locality.

All the operatives are CRV (criminal record vetted) – that is Police checked. It is a member of the *Considerate Contractors* organisation and is BSi Quality assured. Thus Haringey Repairs Service is well equipped to provide a service to leaseholders. There will basically be two types of service:

- o Service model 1
 - A responsive repair service, initially aimed at owner occupiers.
 - It would have a fixed price probably in the region of £60 (plus VAT) for a call out and up to 1 hours labour on site (materials extra, at cost)
 - Subsequent works would then be priced with a quotation.
 - Payment would need to be made at the time of booking using a credit or debit card.

- o Service model 2
 - An annual subscription service, initially designed for leaseholders who rent out their property.
 - It would provide an emergency plumbing, electrical & carpentry service.
 - Annual subscription to be fee paid in advance.
 - Defined menu of items covered – typical jobs would be leaks, electrical problems, lock changes and boarding up.

The purpose of the second model would be that the leaseholder landlord could rely on this service to cover urgent small maintenance work.. It was proposed to commence the services at the beginning of the coming financial year.

Mr Davies explained that they were still working on the pricing and payment methods. It was planned to commence the service in the new financial year and to market it via leaseholder publications. He said that he would like to hear from leaseholders what the demand would be for either model and what leaseholders would like the service to provide.

Mrs Goodhew asked what would happen if a customer was not satisfied with the work carried out. Mr Davies replied that they were considering what sort of procedure they should have for addressing complaints and disputes. Mr Connolly asked whether the service might include refurbishments and improvements, such as new kitchens. Mr Davies replied that this was under consideration as something they might look at in the future.

Mr Kemp thanked Mr Davies for his interesting presentation and he then left the meeting.

3. Report concerning the policy for digital conversion (TV reception) – Anne Goodhew, Vice Chair

Mrs Goodhew said she had contacted Jackie Thomas, Executive Director of Housing Management to find out what the current position was. Ms Thomas had informed her that a report was going to be submitted to the Council's Cabinet on the 23 February and that it would become a public document on the 16 February. Ms Zilkha asked if the Council still proposed to apply for dispensation from the LVT in relation to consultation on the charges for the communal TV aerials. Mr Thevanesan replied that he was not certain, but it was probable that they did not intend to pursue that option.

Ms Breckova raised the question as to whether it was proposed to diverge from the normal statutory consultation regarding the installation of the new communal aerials. Mr Thevanesan said that was no such plan and furthermore there was no danger of the consultation for the work not complying with the statutory requirements. Mr Kemp said that although the statutory requirements had probably been observed the Council had nevertheless fallen well short of good practice, as laid down by Digital UK. Mr Thevanesan responded that the Council was planning more consultation. Part of this would be explained in a booklet that was being drafted and he would consult with them about its contents in the near future.

The question was raised as to whether any informal advice had been received from the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal on this matter. Mr Thevanesan said he believed no advice had been sought or received from the LVT. Furthermore if an application were to be made, the Tribunal would almost certainly require Homes for Haringey to communicate directly with all its leaseholders as had been the case last time and there were no plans to do that. Ms Breckova expressed the view that a dispensation was not appropriate in this case. Mr Thevanesan said that the Council might well take this view and that just because a dispensation was felt to be necessary in the case of the decent homes work, this did not mean it was always necessary to apply to the LVT for one where similar circumstances arose.

4. Administration charges for windows – discussion led by Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership

Mr Thevanesan commenced by explaining that at the last meeting Anne Crellin had requested for the subject to be placed on the agenda. She had suggested that the Panel should not have decided to charge all leaseholders for the administration costs regarding windows. However it should be noted that the Panel was due to review the issue later in the year when more information would be available. To date only a few applications from leaseholders had been received who had decided to go ahead and install their own windows.

He also explained (in answer to a question) that a minor problem had arisen because the Council's Planning Department had recently decided they were

unable to grant planning consent to leaseholders to install UPVC windows unless the landlord (Homes for Haringey, acting on behalf of the Council) has definite plans to install the same type of windows and doors in the property. Under the terms of the lease Homes for Haringey cannot give Landlord Permission until the leaseholder making the application has planning consent for the replacement windows and doors.

Of course HfH is unable to finalise its plans for the new windows and doors in a block of flats until it has carried out a survey. This can only be undertaken in the autumn of the year before the work is scheduled to be undertaken. This is because we often do not know if we will have the necessary funding until the government allocation for the year has been announced, which is generally about this time.

HfH generally replaces the existing windows and doors with standard double glazed units unless there are special considerations, but the decision to go ahead with the work cannot be made until the funding has been confirmed and a survey carried out of the building. This means that leaseholders in future would have a somewhat shorter period to install their own windows and doors if they wanted to do so, but it would not be a major problem.

5. Discussion about the arrangements for the Leaseholders Forum (Spring 2010) – led by Bruce Nicholas, Leasehold Project Officer

Mr Nicholas circulated a draft agenda to Panel Members. The view was expressed that the subject of cleaning should definitely be on the agenda at the Forum. Mr Kemp said that the information on Section 20 Notices should be reviewed since it was insufficient to provide the basis for meaningful consultation. Mrs Goodhew said she felt the Panel should have a direct input into the planning process to ensure that the Forum addressed the sorts of issues leaseholders were concerned about and proposed that a working group should be set up to discuss the agenda and the arrangements for the Forum

- **Action point:** it was agreed to set up a working group. The following people agreed to serve on it: Mrs Goodhew, Mr Laheen, Ms Breckova, Ms Zilkha, Mr Kemp and Ms Gordon.

6. Possible articles for Leaseholder News– March issue (deadline 29 Jan)

The following subjects were put forward:

- Explanatory article on the policy for people applying to install their own windows
- The Council's policy in respect of the installation of communal TV aerials

- o Payment options for major works.

In relation to the last subject Mr Kemp said that leaseholders with large bills for major works should have a longer interest free period in which to pay them. Mr Thevanesan responded that Homes for Haringey was currently working on proposals of this nature. It would put them forward for the Cabinet of the Council to consider in February.

7. Minutes of the meeting of the 2 December – to agree the minutes as a true record.

The minutes were agreed as a true record. There were the following matters arising. At the last meeting Mr Martin-Clark had asked whether it would be possible for Homes for Haringey to provide information for leaseholders to know well in advance how much it would cost them for the installation of new windows in their property.

Mr Nicholas said that the following information had been provided by Asset Management. Although the new windows and doors usually follow a general pattern (for instance they are normally white, UPVC double glazed units), there are a number of other issues which affect the final costs including the individual measurements, style, profile, colour and so on. Hence it would not be possible to give leaseholders reliable advice as to the estimated cost in relation to their properties in advance of the survey which has to be undertaken for each block of flats. .

Mr Martin-Clark also asked whether the minutes of the Core Group should be regarded as confidential, since he considered that this requirement constituted a barrier to reporting back to the Leasehold Panel on its proceedings. Mr Nicholas said he was informed that any agenda items for the Core Group which are confidential are clearly marked as such. Most of the business is not confidential so this should not prevent the submission of reports to the Leasehold Panel on the main issues discussed at the Core Group.

Members of the Panel noted that it had received no reports from the Core Group for some time.

- **Action point.** Mr Thevanesan agreed to contact Mr Martin-Clark to see if he wished to continue as the Panel's representative on the Core Group.

Ms Batzias said that it could be difficult for some leaseholders to claim the 5% discount for payment in full in view of the 14 day period in which one had to make the necessary arrangements for it. Mr Thevanesan responded that if a leaseholder could provide an assurance that they were definitely in contact with their bank to release the funds, then the period could be extended.

BMG Survey. Mr Nicholas thanked all Panel Members who had completed the questionnaire to provide their opinions as to deficiencies in Homes for Haringey's services. There had been a good response – over 25 completed questionnaires had been returned. The Home Ownership Team would collate and summarise the results and the summary would be circulated as soon as possible.

Any other business

Forward agenda proposals Ms Breckova asked about the role of the consultants in the Decent Homes Programme. Mr Thevanesan replied that these were employed by the Compliance Teams. They are responsible for the surveys that are carried out to each block and are closely involved in the calculation of the cost estimates and also the final costs. Ms Breckova then raised the question as to how the costs for their services were recovered through a percentage mark-up in the final invoice.

- **Action point.** Mr Thevanesan said that he would invite Larry Ainsworth or Pauline Hinds to the next meeting to answer questions on this and other aspects of the DHP. He said that Michael Bester, Major Works Officer would also attend to talk about recovery issues in relation to the DHP.

Mr Laheen said that there had been a general shortage of rock salt in relation to car parks, forecourts and estate roads generally.

- **Action point.** Mr Thevanesan said he would refer his comments to Mr Peter Purdie, Head of Estate Management.

Mr Kemp then thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting

BN 21 Jan 2010