



**Minutes of Leasehold Panel meeting, 7.00 pm, Civic Centre,
Monday 30 April 2007**

1. Attendance: Mr R Towerzey, Ms M Rawitzer, Mr M Ruggins, Ms S Brown (Secretary of Haringey Leaseholders Association), Mr N Martin-Clark (Chair of HLA) Ms D Grandson, Ms A Goodhew, Ms A Ibrahim and Mr B Hines.

2. Officers: Mr N Thevanesan, Home Ownership Manager, who chaired the meeting, Ms B Kennedy, Feedback Team Manager, Mr P Davey, Housing Information Manager and Mr B Nicholas, Project Officer.

3. Opening remarks. Mr Thevanesan said unfortunately there had had to be a last minute change to the agenda. Gethin Segel Business Support, Quality & Learning Manager sent his apologies since he was unable to attend for family reasons. Bernadette Kennedy had kindly agreed at the last minute to make a report on another subject.

4. Minutes of the last meeting (20 March). The minutes were agreed as a true record.

5. Matters arising. There were no matters arising. Mr Martin-Clark raised the question as to whether he could make a tape-recording of the proceedings. Mr Thevanesan responded that he would have to seek clarification of Homes for Haringey's policy on the matter before he could provide a definitive answer.

6. Learning Report – learning from feedback to provide better services - Bernadette Kennedy, Feedback Team Manager. Ms Kennedy referred throughout her talk to a list of key issues identified in the last learning report, which was circulated with the agenda. She explained that learning reports are based on the analysis of customer feedback, satisfaction data and the results of audits which identify areas which are affecting services to customers. The list consisted of issues which Mr Segel had selected and which he considered were of particular interest to leaseholders. These were as follows:

Homes for Haringey

- a) Storage and disposal of refuse. Some residents are apt to leave black plastic bags for long periods outside their front doors. Others block refuse chutes by inappropriate use. The Estate Services Manager is ascertaining ways of making residents more aware of the need to behave responsibly in these matters.
 - b) Information from resident monitors. At present the performance indicators, which HfH produces in relation to its services do not contain any reference to information provided by the resident monitors. There is a growing number of these and they regularly complete feedback forms on the housing services which are provided to their buildings and estates. Ms Kennedy said that at present 125 monitors have been trained and quite a lot more are awaiting training. Panel Members felt that this was an important issue and that information should be provided to residents on how the feedback provided by resident monitors was being recorded and acted upon.
 - c) List of repairs outstanding for estate inspections. The learning point was that this type of information is necessary for estate inspections and Customer Services, in order to avoid duplication in repairs reporting.
 - d) Realistic timescales for estate repairs. Officers should be more aware of the priorities that can be allocated to different types of repairs and be able to advise residents and Members accordingly. Regarding both c) and d) Panel Members were generally in agreement that the follow up to estate inspections, both in terms of action and feedback to attendees, required substantial improvements. Ms Kennedy responded that HfH recognised that more needed to be done and this was under consideration. Ms Rawitzer gave as a specific instance in relation to this matter the fact that an estate inspection had taken place on Hillcrest about 6 weeks previously but no report had yet been produced. Ms Brown said that HfH's policy was to produce it within 2 weeks.
- ❖ **Action point.** Mr Thevanesan said that he would ask what was happening about this and advise her accordingly.
- e) Methods of obtaining access. The learning point referred to the fact that a phone call prior to an inspection could often be the most effective way of ensuring access.
 - f) Rectification of defects. It had been ascertained that there was a problem in dealing with defects reported after the completion of major works which would need to be addressed prior to the start of the decent homes programme. Panel Members

expressed the view that there needed to be clearer and more effective procedures relating to project management to ensure that defects were rectified before the final payment stage.

- g) Ingress of water into properties. The learning point stated that where leakages of water have occurred the residents who have been affected should receive a letter to explain the reasons and a brief explanation of the remedial action taken to ensure that it would not happen again.
 - h) Tackling low level anti social behaviour. More tools needed for Tenancy Management Officers to tackle noise, kids playing close to flats, graffiti, proper disposal of refuse and so on. Ms Grandson said that the first step was to write to people to inform them of the normal rules of reasonable neighbourly conduct.
- ❖ **Action point.** It was agreed to invite Winston Reid to speak on the subject.

7. Reporting repairs via the web – graphical repairs ordering (GRO) system - Peter Davey, Housing Information Manager. Mr Davey began his presentation by explaining that reporting repairs online was first made available for tenants in December. It was part of HfH's general improvement plans. It was also in accordance with the Government's strategy of providing online services wherever possible, since they are cheap to run after they have been set up. Since December 450 repair jobs had been reported by tenants, of which three quarters had been completed. There had been 30 queries to the email address provided for help and advice. Comments received so far indicated that people had found the online service useful and accessible.

The reason it is called a graphical repairs ordering system (GRO) Mr Davey said is that pictorial guides are included to various parts of the flat or building as part of the web pages for reporting repairs online. These have been taken from a booklet (the *Repairs Handbook*) on reporting repairs, which had been distributed to all residents. The system should assist residents in giving clearer and more precise details of the repairs they wished to report. As a 'self service system' it would also enable people with sight or hearing disabilities or those whose English was not very good to access the repairs reporting system. In a similar way to the other methods of repairs reporting, it provides the user with immediate notification of the time and date of an appointment for an inspection. In the longer term it should reduce the pressure on the Call Centre and the Customer Services offices. Various aspects of the system were being introduced in stages.

Homes for Haringey

Thus access to the GRO system has now been extended to leaseholders – the short delay occurred while leaseholders' details (which are held on a separate database) were input to the system. Mr Davey apologised that some of the titles (Mr, Ms, etc) may not be what people would prefer, but deciding these had involved a certain amount of guesswork. All leaseholders were now being sent their personal identity numbers (PINs) and their passwords, which were required in order to gain access to and use the system. Regular monitoring ensured that in cases where there was a change of ownership or clear abuse of the system (eg reporting a large number of unlikely repairs, for instance by a child) the account would be suspended until the matter had been clarified.

Mr Davey provided a demonstration on a projector as to how customers could use the system online. He showed examples of the various web pages a leaseholder could access, as part of the GRO system. It was designed so that leaseholders could only report repairs to the outside and the communal areas of the building. General estate repairs could not be reported at present, but it is possible to report repairs to fences, gates, etc. The description of the building in the system will include the numbers of flats in the block (for example '1-20 Acacia Court'). This will confirm to the customer that the system is showing them the correct location. A repairs history will be displayed for each building as from the 30 April onwards, so that customers can avoid reporting repairs that have already been reported by someone else. It was not possible to include details prior to this since the cost of doing so would be too great.

Leaseholders raised a number of questions at the end of Mr Davey's presentation. They were interested as to whether there would be any additional costs resulting from the introduction and operation of the new system. Mr Davey responded that there would be some set up costs but these had been kept to a minimum because there was an agreement with the software provider, Anite, that Homes for Haringey would not bear the full cost. This was in view of the fact that HfH had contributed to a lot of the development of what was essentially a new system – it would in all likelihood be adopted by a number of other boroughs. The running costs were expected to be very low and there would also be savings as a result of a reduction in calls to Customer Services, since dealing with reports made in person is much more expensive than those made online.

Mr Davey confirmed that defects with windows, in relation to the frames, catches etc could be reported online. With regard to customer satisfaction surveys online, he said that it was proposed to provide these online later this year. The GRO system only covered day to day repairs, so it did not cover grounds maintenance issues and so on. In the future

Homes for Haringey

HfH was considering providing leaseholders with the option of ordering internal repairs on a rechargeable basis.

8. Leaseholders Forum – proposed arrangements -

The Panel took note of the arrangements contained in the draft agenda:

Draft agenda for Forum.

Meeting in the Debating Chamber 10 to 11.30am –

- Independent Chair – Jackie Dickins, HQN Consultant
- Welcome - Jackie Thomas - Executive Director of Housing Management
- Bob Watts - Executive Director of Building Services
- Questions from the floor

Workshops – 3 workshops from 12 to 1.30pm:

- Peter Purdie - Estate management
- Jacinta Walters/Catherine O'Reilly - Decent homes - Resident involvement and consultation strategy
- Nesan Thevanesan – services provided by the Home Ownership Team.
- Citizens Advice Bureau – Presentation on benefit and debt advice

9. Any other business.

Mr Martin-Clark said that he wished to raise some points in relation to the proposed decent homes programme. He criticised the second section 20 notice which had been published in the local press at the beginning of April. He said that very few leaseholders had noticed it in their local paper. More generally, he felt that leaseholders were concerned as to the sort of information they were going to receive beforehand about the programme of major works for this year. They felt it would be appropriate for as much information to be provided as possible in advance, once the plans for the programme had been drawn up. Mr Thevanesan responded that some preliminary details were provided in the latest edition of Homes Zone, which had just been issued. It was also proposed to provide some project information as soon as possible. He agreed to ascertain further what was proposed to keep leaseholders informed of future plans.

Mr Martin-Clark said that he believed that most leaseholders agreed that much more notice was required than that provided by the notice under Schedule 3, which is only issued about 4 weeks prior to the commencement of the work. Many leaseholders also believed that they should have the right to nominate another contractor to provide

Homes for Haringey

an alternative tender for the work. He said that the subject of the decent homes programme should be scheduled on the agenda for the next meeting of the Panel (31 May).

- ❖ **Action point.** It was agreed to invite Ola Akinfe, Head of Asset Management to the next meeting (31 May). Mr Thevanesan asked if Mr Martin-Clark could provide him as soon as possible (by email) with some suggestions for the sorts of areas he would like Mr Akinfe to cover.

Mr Thevanesan concluded the meeting by thanking Ms Kennedy and Mr Davey on behalf of the Panel for their very interesting and informative reports.

- End -