



Leasehold Panel

Minutes of the meeting, 14 January 2009.

1. Attendance. Mr Nick Martin-Clark (Chair), Mrs Anne Goodhew (Vice Chair), Ms M Powell, Mr Charles Connolly, Mr Michael Ruggins, Ms Shirley Perlman, Ms Lynne Zilkha, Mr M Pentol, Mr B Hines, Ms Francell Pinnock, Ms Millie Mboizi

[Two people didn't sign in, so their names have unfortunately not been recorded].

Chair: the meeting was chaired by Mr Nick Martin-Clark.

Officers. Mr Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership, Mr Les Armstrong, Head of Engineering Design, Ms Pauline Hinds, Strategic Client Representative, Mr Michael Bester, Major Works Lead Officer and Mr Bruce Nicholas, Leasehold Project Officer, who took the minutes.

2. Minutes of the last meetings – 4 September and 9 October 2008.

Mr Martin-Clark commenced the meeting by tabling a motion (please see attached). It was pointed out that no prior notice had been given regarding this motion and Mr Thevanesan said that the business of the meeting should be confined to what had been included on the agenda. However the Panel decided to hear Mr Martin-Clark's reasons for tabling the motion and Mrs Goodhew then took the chair to enable Mr Martin-Clark to speak to the motion.

He commenced by objecting to the shortened format in which the minutes of the 9 October had been presented. He said he believed that the old format of the minutes should be followed, since people who did not attend the meeting might find them difficult to follow.

Mr Thevanesan replied that the new format was in accordance with the standard style for minutes throughout the Council. Care would be continued to be taken in drafting the minutes to ensure that no special knowledge would be required in understanding them – that is, it would not be necessary to be a regular attendee in order to be able to follow them. The old style of minutes was very time consuming to prepare. The main purpose of the meetings was to consider policy issues as placed on the agenda and to record the decisions reached on them by the Panel as a whole. More detail was apt to lead to individual Panel Members feeling that their views had not been properly recorded.

- ❖ **Action point. Mr Thevanesan said that on this occasion he would agree to the minutes being recorded in the old style, until the matter had been resolved.**

Mr Martin-Clark said that views as well as decisions should also be recorded. Mr Thevanesan responded that Panel's primary purpose was to make recommendations on policy issues to the Board and that the various views expressed were not generally appropriate to be recorded.

Mr Martin-Clark considered the minutes should be under the control of the Chair of the Panel. The officers were there to serve the Panel. However Mr Thevanesan explained that the Panel was a joint body with a jointly agreed agenda. Its purpose was for Homes for Haringey to put forward its policy proposals and for the Members of the Panel to state their views on them. As in the past Homes for Haringey would endeavour to respond positively to the views expressed by the Panel in respect of what it proposed to do. The role of the officers was to service the Panel.

Mrs Goodhew then proposed the following motion to summarise the issues contained in Mr Martin-Clark's motion: "We have a problem in the Panel and we are going to discuss it outside the Panel. The Panel takes note of this procedural problem." This was passed with 8 in favour, 2 against and 3 abstentions. Mr Martin-Clark then resumed the chair.

It was agreed that consideration of the minutes of the meetings of the 4 September and 9 October 2008 would be deferred pending the outcome of the proposed meeting between Mr Martin-Clark with a delegation of leaseholders and Ms Jackie Thomas, Executive Director of Homes for Haringey.

3. Decent homes programme – update on progress of work– Pauline Hinds, Strategic Client Representative, Asset Management Department. Ms Hinds gave figures for the numbers of properties for work in progress and on which work had been completed so far:

	Number of properties		Satisfaction
	Work in progress	Work completed	%
South Tottenham	137	371	96%
North Tottenham	147	377	95%
Wood Green	109	191	99%
Hornsey	49	128	86%
	442	1,067	

In answer to a question from Mr Connolly Ms Hinds said the rates of satisfaction shown above were summarised from the results of a questionnaire that had been sent to all residents in the blocks where work had been done. Mr Connolly requested whether it would be possible to have separate results for leaseholders since they generally tended to be more critical. Ms Hinds agreed it should be possible to provide a breakdown in future. The satisfaction surveys had confirmed her experience, which was that the standard of work had been very high.

Ms Hinds said 1,067 properties had been completed to the decent homes standard; it was planned that 1,894 would be completed by the end of March. It was expected that the budget of £34 million for this year would be fully spent. The surveys required for the work contained in next year's programme had been completed and it was proposed to start site preparations in March. In view of the good progress maintained so far, Homes for Haringey considered it would be appropriate to accelerate the programme and had written to the Government to suggest this. Ms Zilkha asked whether all the initial surveys had been carried out to ascertain the condition of each block. Ms Hinds responded that building surveys were nearing completion but quite a few individual (tenanted) flats remained to be surveyed to assess the internal works required to them.

Ms Zilkha asked to know whether leaseholders could obtain a copy of the survey undertaken to assess the condition of the block in which their property was situated. Ms Hinds replied where surveys had been completed copies would be available on request. Ms Zilkha stated that according to the information she had received all the block condition surveys required for the programme had now been completed.

Mr Connolly requested to know whether and if so in what ways residents' views were being taken into account in respect of the details of the works required under the decent homes programme. Ms Hinds said that residents were consulted about matters such as colour schemes, type of door, etc.

Mr Ruggins requested that in future it would be a good idea if a short written report could be circulated to Panel Members regarding progress on the decent homes programme. It would be helpful if it could contain as much information as possible specifically relating to leaseholders. The Panel endorsed this proposal.

4. Proposed digital TV contract – charging options concerning leaseholders – Les Armstrong, Head of Engineering Design. Mr Armstrong commenced his report by explaining that Homes for Haringey had carefully considered the views leaseholders had expressed against what they felt were the high costs (to leaseholders) of digital conversion. Therefore a comprehensive review was now being carried out of the policy for digital conversion. This would cover the following aspects:

- o Specification and installation
- o Procurement process
- o Evaluation of applications to tender ongoing
- o Tendering to be carried out over the next couple of months.

Mr Armstrong said the question of an opt-out for leaseholders was an entirely separate issue to the policies required in the tendering of the work. Thus whether or not an opt-out was agreed would not affect the tendering of the work. A very important consideration which also had to be fully addressed was the necessity to minimise the reasons for residents to wish to install their own satellite dishes. The installation of these dishes was a very significant potential cause of damage to the outside of the building and their presence often was a source of annoyance to other residents, sometimes affecting the views from their windows, etc. If leaseholders were allowed to opt out, problems might arise when properties were sold and the new owners wanted to connect to the communal system.

Mr Armstrong said it would be necessary to discuss all the issues relating to the possibility of allowing an opt-out for leaseholders within Homes for Haringey and also with the Council. Ms Zilkha said leaseholders should have a direct input into any discussions of this nature. Mr Armstrong agreed but said there were a lot of issues to be addressed - an opt-out for leaseholders had not been ruled out at present. The Engineering Design Department would be preparing a report on all the relevant issues for the Executive Management Team. In answer to a question he said that as a general rule it was proposed only to install new communal systems to replace the existing ones.

Mrs Goodhew raised the question of how much the unit cost would be and Mr Armstrong replied that it was hoped that in the present climate the benefits of bulk procurement would result in significant reductions in the costs previously quoted. Ms Powell believed that leaseholders should have the right to opt out in view of the fact it was not an essential service. She also

believed that the question of preventing the erection of individual satellite dishes was of little relevance to the question of whether leaseholders should have the right to opt out.

- ❖ **Action point.** Mr Thevanesan said he would invite Mr O'Driscoll to the next meeting. It was agreed to include the item on the agenda for the next 2 meetings to ensure a full consideration of the subject.

5. Draft booklet – Leaseholders invoices for major works and draft Major Works Standards – Mike Bester, Major Works Lead Officer. Mr Bester explained the nature and operation of the standards (please see attached). Mr Thevanesan said that the standards had been incorporated in the booklet on the payment options (entitled *Leaseholders invoices for major works*), which would be enclosed with leaseholders bills in future.

Ms Zilkha raised 2 questions. She said it would considerably enhance security if there were alarms on the scaffolding to detect intruders at night. She also asked whether guarantees would be made available for work such as new roofs and windows and doors. She requested to know how long the guarantee periods would be.

Mr Bester replied that the use of alarms was usually restricted to smaller schemes, since if one was set off accidentally or malfunctioned on a large site, it could be difficult to locate it before it had caused considerable inconvenience. However, all contractors used by Haringey were instructed to leave the site secure at the end of each day. He said this generally involves ensuring that the scaffolding cannot be accessed from ground level and that all ladders etc are secured. On the question of guarantees, he said the defects liability period was invariably 12 months and undertook to obtain more specific information on roofs and windows.

- ❖ **Action point.** Mr Thevanesan said he would obtain some more information about the availability of guarantees by the next meeting.

Mr Martin-Clark then put the matter to the vote and the Panel unanimously endorsed the major works standards.

6. Plain-English Guide to the Lease. Copies of the draft were circulated. Panel Members were requested to inform Mr Nicholas if they had any observations on this booklet.

It was agreed to postpone consideration of the last item on the agenda, the Home Ownership Team plan owing to lack of time. Mr Martin-Clark then

thanked Ms Hinds, Mr Armstrong and Mr Bester for their interesting and useful reports and closed the meeting.

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Decent Homes - Service Standards (updated)

The Home Ownership Team is committed to delivering a high-quality service to our customers. We intend to involve our customers in a meaningful way in order to continuously improve our service. Our service standards set out the service you can expect from us.

Consultation

- We always consult our leaseholders about any major work (over £250) more than is legally necessary.
- We send all leaseholders in the building a 'Section 20 Notice' to provide details of the works and an estimate of the cost. You will receive this at least 30 days before the work is due to start.
- You have the right to make observations in writing and we will reply within 21 days.
- Home Ownership officers will be ready to attend resident meetings during the consultation period or arrange home visits if requested.
- 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.

Keeping you informed

- At the beginning of the financial year, we will write to leaseholders if their property is in the programme in order to:
 - give a description of the work that has been planned
 - invite you to a workshop including advice on payment options.
- We will also publish information on our website about the work planned for each address.
- We will let all residents living in the building know what is happening through newsletters and a local meeting.
- After the work is finished we will write to you to:
 - confirm that the work has been completed
 - advise who to contact during the 12 month defects liability period
- (Towards the end of this period) find out whether any problems remain to be dealt with.

Getting the work done

- We are very committed to good customer care at all stages of the work.
- We expect staff and contractors to meet high standards throughout - please see Decent Homes - A guide for residents for more details.

Billing

- We will send you the invoice (for your part of the estimated cost of the work) soon after the contractor starts on site. At the same time we will let you know what options you have to pay and enclose a summary of your legal rights regarding your invoice.

Payment

- We provide a wide range of payment options - please see page xx).
- We will offer you up to 6 weeks to arrange payment if you need a loan from a bank or building society.
- If you would like more detail we will discuss the payment options with you on a one to one basis.
- If you are on a low income and have problems in paying your invoice we can refer you to the Citizens' Advice Bureau. We have an arrangement with them to fast-track referrals -please see page x.

Final Account

- 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.
- We will send you a breakdown with the final account to show how the costs relate to the original estimate.
- If you wish, we will give you the opportunity to inspect the accounts and the supporting documents when the final statement of account is issued
- We will provide you with of copy of the guarantee for your new windows and doors. We will let you know the guarantee period for work such as a new roof.

- We will not issue a separate invoice for any work less than £250. It will be included in the annual actual service charge. This is to avoid leaseholders having to pay an additional management fee.

Queries and Disputes

- We will deal promptly with all queries and complaints – please see page **xx**
- We may agree to mediation where a dispute cannot be resolved through our complaints procedure - please see Section 5, Queries and complaints on page xx for more details.

Windows

- If you wish to install your own windows and doors you can apply to us to do so. We will usually be able to allow this, provided it can be done before our contractors start on site. Please phone 8489 xxxx or email (EMAIL ADDRESS) for more details

Other Services

- We will provide leaseholders with the necessary information if they wish to buy kitchen and bathroom fittings as supplied by our contractors under the Decent Homes Programme.

Getting Involved

- We consult with the Leasehold Panel on service delivery issues, new policies and any new long-term agreements. It is open to any leaseholder who would like to attend. Please phone xxxx or email (LEASEHOLD PANEL ADDRESS) for more details.

CHAIR'S MOTION TO 14/1/09 LEASEHOLD PANEL

- 1) The panel notes that it was legitimately suspended at its last meeting on the 6th of November 2008 and that no minutes of that meeting have been provided. The panel notes further that the present meeting was convened without consultation with the chair over timing or minutes and that this is a breach of procedure. As a result significant problems with the minutes remain.
- 2) The panel takes note of the letter from the Executive Director of Housing and, in particular, of the promise she makes of a further meeting with the panel delegation to sort out these problems once the meeting to do with the Chair's complaint has taken place. The panel wishes to be kept informed of the progress of that complaint.
- 3) As a guiding principle the panel wishes to remind officers that respect for residents and the integrity of the panel's procedures and minutes are non-negotiable. The panel must give leaseholders a genuine say and not be a sham.
- 4) Pending an agreed resolution therefore the panel's present view is that the following minutes must be temporarily rejected:
 - i) 6/8/08 –incomplete without the two documents
 - ii) 4/9/08 – inaccurately records the minutes of 6/8 as accepted
 - iii) 9/10/08 – to be rewritten in old format and include an adequate account of long discussion with J. Thomas
 - iv) 6/11/08 – to be provided complete with HLA document
- 5) The panel wishes officers to note that if the minutes of at least this present meeting cannot be agreed with the Chair in advance of the next one the Chair is authorised to re-suspend the panel. In that event officers are urged to inform members of the cancellation of the February meeting in advance so as to avoid them wasting their time.