



Leasehold Panel

Minutes of the meeting, 16th March 2009.

1. Attendance. Mr Nick Martin-Clark (Chair), Mrs Anne Goodhew (Vice Chair), Ms Lesley Ramm, Mr Roger Kemp, Mr Jon Waseem, Mrs M Shaw, Mrs R Batzias, Mr C Connolly, Mr D Connolly, Mr Piers Johnson, Mrs S Dorsett, Mr Frank Tunney, Mrs Delsie Grandson, Mr B Hines, Ms Sylvia Morgan, Ms L A Parris (16).

Apologies. Mr Michael Ruggins sent his apologies.

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

Officers. Mr Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership, Natasha Kendall, Account Manager, BMG Research, Pauline Hinds Strategic Client Representative and Mr Nick Claxton, Senior Home Ownership Officer, who took the minutes.

Mr Martin-Clark and the Panel noted with sadness the passing of Mrs Florence Jocelyn, a regular attendee of the Panel meetings.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

Ms Ramm confirmed that she had made a mistake in the figure she had quoted at the last meeting for the estimated cost of the annual maintenance of the digital TV receivers at Newlands House.

It was then agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 18th February 2009 were a fair and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

In respect of the action points arising from the last meeting Mr Martin-Clark referred the Panel to the summary, which Mr Thevanesan had circulated with the papers for the meeting (see attachment to these minutes). The following additional points were noted:

- a. There is no standard period for guarantees regarding new roofs, they vary in accordance with the type of roof.

- b. The matter regarding the failure to distribute major work satisfaction surveys to leaseholders at Newlands House has been referred to Larry Ainsworth, Project Manager

- **ACTION point. Mr Thevanesan said he would report on the progress of this issue at the next meeting.**

- c. The issues regarding TV reception at Newlands House had been discussed but the reception had improved without requiring any work. Any remedial action required will still be identified and reported on at the next meeting.
- d. Mr Thevanesan reported that the decision as to which works are included in which scheme lay with LBH and that the current instructions received from them was to include TV reception systems as part of the Decent Homes Programme.
- e. Mr Thevanesan reported that the interest rates on discretionary loans would be reviewed annually and that a rise is anticipated for the future. Mr Martin-Clark asked if a sharp rise occurred then would LBH's rate of 2% on top of base rate still be realistic and fair to leaseholders. Mr Thevanesan advised the Panel that this would be looked at as part of the review.
- f. Mr Martin-Clark expressed concern that the new payment options for major works were not applicable retrospectively to other schemes and that this may become a live issue for the Leasehold Panel. Mr Thevanesan replied that the Home Ownership Team would examine every case on its merits and that people with financial problems would be referred to the Citizens Advice Bureau for independent advice.

- **ACTION point: Mr Thevanesan said he would report to the next meeting on the number of bills issued and the take-up of the different payment options regarding the major works invoices issued in relation to Year 1 of the Decent Homes. The invoices would be issued at the end of March.**

The Leasehold Panel passed a MOTION stating in the strongest terms that the current policy regarding the installation of digital TV receivers is wholly unacceptable. Thus at Newlands House leaseholders and other residents received no consultation or notice of the works being carried out and no proper information about the choice of channels available through the new system. A Panel Member reported she was given the choice of "do you want all the channels or just some of them?" by a workman who was carrying out the work without any prior notification.

As a result of the lack of information the leaseholder opted for a package giving her access to TurkSat, amongst a range of channels which she and other leaseholders do not want. There was also a lack of clear information

regarding pricing, the choice of packages and which schemes works fall under. The Leasehold Panel said there should be more resident involvement in the tendering process, and that schemes of this kind should not be continued without full consultation with all residents.

- **ACTION point: Panel requested Mr Thevanesan to report their views to the Senior Management Team.**

4. Leaseholder Satisfaction Survey, Natasha Kendall, Account Manager, BMG Research.

Ms Kendall reported that the survey was a large-scale, cross-borough project. A number of other boroughs had participated in drawing up the questionnaire other London authorities and they were carrying out surveys of their leaseholders at approximately the same time. This would enable the data to be used for benchmarking with the survey results from other boroughs later in 2009.

The survey questionnaire had been sent to a random sample of leaseholders through the post between October and December 2008. Ms Kendall reported that BMG had received 556 responses, which represents 19% of the total questionnaires (3,000) sent out. Ms Kendall reported that the response level had been increased by 3% through the use of email reminders and an online version.

The slides accompanying Ms Kendall's presentation are included as an appendix to these minutes.

During the course of the presentation the following key points were noted:

- There was a higher level of satisfaction amongst the younger black and minority respondents by ethnic group.
- There was large dissatisfaction surrounding issues regarding sublet leasehold properties.
- It appeared that proximity to some socially deprived areas was apt to result in higher levels of dissatisfaction in neighbouring localities
- Anti-Social Behaviour issues have had a significant negative impact on the levels of satisfaction
- A number of the key issues were the same as when the survey was last carried out in 2004, suggesting a lack of progress in some areas.

Ms Kendall noted from her findings that the Home Ownership Team (HOT) was performing better than the organisation overall when it came to the customer contact experience. The greater use of email and the web by HOT assisted in providing customers with an enhanced means of access, which would constitute an ongoing strength in service delivery.

Key issues pertaining to the administration of service charges were:

- There was a 25% decline in satisfaction regarding value for money
- There was a 66% level of dissatisfaction amongst leaseholders who pay more than ground rent and insurance
- Leaseholders had indicated in their responses that they would prefer to be billed in arrears.

Ms Kendall summarised that it was quite difficult to draw clear conclusions from the results. While 28% expressed that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with regard to major works, the percentages of satisfied and dissatisfied leaseholders were so close as to offer no definite outcome either way. This reflected a similar position in the general survey. The data did, however, identify certain key localities that would act as drivers towards resolving a number of the issues causing prime concern, such as antisocial behaviour, and that partnership working between Haringey Council, Homes for Haringey and the Metropolitan Police and other organisations would play a major role in this.

The Chair invited questions from the Panel, the discussion of which identified the following points:

- The general low level of satisfaction reflected in the survey had probably been affected by a number of localities which were pulling down the results. There had been an overall decline in levels of satisfaction with services and related charges at the national level, but the impact certain areas had had on the general level of satisfaction in the Haringey area appeared to be significant.
 - The introduction of controlled parking zones may have contributed to the decline in satisfaction levels.
 - It was hard to quantify the impact of the current economic climate as no data exists from the last recession that would enable comparison.
- **ACTION: Mr Thevanesan to provide a comparison against the tenant's survey and report on findings at the next meeting.**

Mr Martin-Clark asked how often the surveys were carried out. Mr Thevanesan explained that there was a requirement for a customer satisfaction survey every three years, but that HfH had conducted the exercise more frequently in recent years. Mr Thevanesan advised the Panel that there was a cost implication for leaseholders in the undertaking of surveys, as they are paid for through the service charge (management fee).

Mr Thevanesan reported that going forward HfH would be working in conjunction with the Leasehold Panel to examine the issues that the survey had identified. Mr Martin-Clark expressed the view that the value of the

survey would be in the ongoing work to target and improve key areas, both geographically and in terms of service provision.

5. Decent Homes Programme – Update on Progress of Work – Pauline Hinds Strategic Client Representative, Asset Management.

Ms Hinds began her presentation by apologising to the Panel for not being able to provide a copy of the briefing that they had expected [she was asked to attend at short notice].

- **ACTION: Ms Hinds said she would ask for a Decent Homes briefing to be provided in advance of the next talk to the Panel, which would be made by Mr Larry Ainsworth at the meeting on the 13 May.**

Ms Hinds reported on the survey conducted to assess satisfaction with work carried out under Decent Homes Year 1. Ms Hinds noted the following points:

- The survey forms contained no identifiers to indicate whether the resident was a tenant or a leaseholder.
- A manual exercise would have to be undertaken to separate out leaseholders' views from those of tenants in the survey results.
- A meeting would be held with the consultants to discuss the information obtained from the survey results and the issues which had been identified requiring further action.
- Asset Management had met with HOT to discuss the results.
- The results would not take into account the views of non-resident leaseholders, since they are not sent survey questionnaires
- Work would be undertaken to develop a questionnaire more geared towards covering issues of interest to leaseholders (regarding work to the communal and external areas, etc).

Ms Hinds advised the Panel that the final report on the surveys would be completed by mid-March, but provided the following results indicating the level of satisfaction with the works carried out in the following areas:

- Hornsey – 91%
- Wood green – 97%
- South Tottenham – 100%
- North Tottenham – 91%.

A discussion ensued which raised the following points:

- Newlands House – leaseholders there did not receive a satisfaction survey. There appeared to be a lack of clarity in respect of who had the responsibility for distributing and collecting the questionnaires

- Conduct of surveys. Why are the contractor partners responsible for the distribution and collection of the questionnaires regarding the work they have carried out? It was felt that this should be done by Homes for Haringey or the Council. From the evidence of leaseholders present at the meeting it was obvious that the results, at least as far as Newlands House was concerned, were not representative as they did not include the leaseholders and seemed not to reflect the feelings of tenants either. This situation could have been repeated elsewhere and therefore the overall figures could be very misleading and should at the least have notes appended to explain the basis for them.'
- The questionnaire did not appear to cover issues relevant to leaseholders, for instance it did not refer to value for money matters

Ms Hinds stated that in the past there had been very little response to surveys distributed by LBH themselves.

The following suggestions were made for the future:

- The Leasehold Panel should have some input into the development of the surveys
- Information should be provided with the survey on costs so leaseholders have the information to hand they need to assess whether or not they are getting value for money
- **ACTION: Ms Hinds agreed to ensure that the report to the Panel on these matters would provide an update on the proposed future use of the satisfaction questionnaires so as to enable a better coverage of leaseholder concerns.**
- **ACTION: Mr Thevanesan said he would contact Larry Ainsworth to see whether it might still be possible to distribute satisfaction questionnaires to leaseholders at Newlands House**

Ms Hinds informed the Panel that the target level for satisfaction is 85%. Anything less is a trigger for investigation and remedial action.

- **ACTION: Mr Martin-Clark said he would also raise the issue regarding the distribution of the questionnaire to leaseholders at Newlands House (Waites (Constructor Partner) at the next Core group meeting**

Mr Martin-Clark reported that he had requested the Core Group keep him informed of any complaints, but that this information had not been forthcoming.

Ms Hinds finished by reporting that 1,894 units were on target to be completed under year 1 of the Decent Homes Programme, and that

consultations were currently under way for Year 2. In the summer preparation will commence for Year 3, at which time workshops and advice days will be co-ordinated.

5: Annual Team Plan for the Home Ownership Team

- It was **AGREED** that this item would be deferred to the next meeting.

6: Short Report from Sublet Group – Mrs Anne Goodhew, (Vice Chair)

Mrs Goodhew referred the Panel to a short report on the first meeting of the Sublet Group (appended to these minutes).

Mrs Goodhew noted that Sharon Morgan, Head of Tenancy Management (North) was now a member of the group, along with Mr Thevanesan and Miss Pari Badiani, Home Sales Team Leader, of the Home Ownership Team.

The Panel were invited to bring suggestions, issues and contributions for the next Sublet Group meeting, to be held in April 2009, and also reports of specific incidents they felt should be brought to the Sub Group's attention.

The most important issue was seen as being the lack of registration of sublets by non-resident leaseholders. Mr Martin-Clark asked why the registration process was not operating to the desired standard and if it would be possible to positively ascertain properties where there were subletting tenants. Mrs Goodhew advised the Chair that these were matters for ongoing discussion and that the first meeting of the group had served to identify matters for further consideration.

7: Any Other Business

- a) Mr Thevanesan asked for a volunteer from the panel to sit on the Communal Repairs Project Group. Mr Piers Johnson volunteered, pending confirmation from Mr Thevanesan of the time commitment. Mr Thevanesan advised the panel that the group would meet once a month during the day for 2 hours and that occasional daytime workshops would also occur.

- **ACTION: Mr Thevanesan to arrange for Mr Johnson's name to be forwarded to the Communal Repairs Project Group.**

- b) Mr Thevanesan reported to the panel that the Annual Participation Questionnaire 2009/2010 would be circulated to panel members shortly.

Mr Martin-Clark referred to a response received from Mr Paul Bridge, Chief Executive of HfH in regard to a complaint lodged by Mr Martin-Clark. Mr Martin-Clark acknowledged the impact this had had on the Leasehold Panel and thanked the members for their patience and support through the disruption to regular meetings and the agreement of minutes that had occurred.

Mr Martin-Clark further thanked the Panel for their vote of confidence and expressed the view that this had been essential in securing the apology offered by Mr Bridge.

Mr Martin-Clark also referred to a response to Mr Bridge's letter from Sue Brown, Chair of Haringey Leaseholders' Association. This letter outlines the HLA's request for increased partnership working with HfH and the Council, and for increased funding to enable the HLA to establish proper resources to provide advice to leaseholders where it currently can only provide a "sympathetic ear". Mr Martin-Clark noted that no response had been received by the HLA.

- **It was AGREED that the Leasehold Panel believes that Mr Bridge's apology should be accepted and is happy with the resolution of this matter.**

The Chair advised the Panel that the outstanding issues regarding the Leasehold Panel would be discussed and resolved at a later date through ongoing discussion.

Mr Martin-Clark thanked Ms Kendall, Ms Hinds and Mrs Goodhew for their very interesting reports and closed the meeting

Dates of Future Meetings

20th April; 13th May; 8th June; 1st July; 9th September & 7th October.

Time: 7:00 – 9:00 pm

Venue: Wood Green Civic Centre