



Leasehold Panel

Minutes of the Meeting, 2 March 2010

1. Attendance: Mr Roger Kemp (Chair of Leasehold Panel), Ms Rita Batzias, Ms Y Thompson, Mrs Anne Goodhew (Vice Chair of Leasehold Panel), Mrs Susanah Adewumi, Mr B Hines, Mr & Mrs Wright, Ms S Morgan, Ms Wollny, Mrs Shirley Perlman, Mr R Dalliday, Mrs M Shaw, Miss M Merrick, Ms Annette Joslyn, Mr Martin Laheen, Mrs Delsie Grandson, Mrs Maureen Clement, Ms Lynne Zilkha and Mr Charles Connolly.

Chair: Mr Roger Kemp chaired the meeting.

Apologies: Mr M Pentol.

Officers: Ms Jackie Thomas, Executive Director of Housing Management, Mr Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership and Mr Bruce Nicholas, Leasehold Project Officer who took the minutes.

1. The new policy on the installation of digital communal TV systems – integrated reception systems - (following the submission of a paper to the Cabinet on the 23 February) – report back from Jackie Thomas, Executive Director of Housing Management.

Ms Thomas commenced with a short explanation of the events leading up to the change in policy. Some leaseholders had expressed views very much against the policy for digital conversion. This was understandable since the cost of installation had been up to £1000 in certain cases under the Decent Homes Programme. Homes for Haringey had undertaken a formal procurement process in respect of the appointment of specialist contractors for digital conversion. This is expected to result in the costs of installation generally being in the region of £400 to £500 for the type of system which has been installed up to date.

Ms Thomas said Homes for Haringey had submitted a report to the Council containing a number of recommendations. She noted that it was open to any resident to have a copy of the report if they were interested. In summary the recommendations were as follows:

- o Block by block consultation to decide which IRS system residents wish to have installed
- o A choice between two options
- o Tenants and leaseholders to be charged their share of the cost up to a maximum of £400 per property
- o The cost should be recovered from tenants over a 10 year period
- o A retrospective cap of £400 to be applied to the amounts charged to leaseholders for IRS work already completed.
- o A policy for the removal of residents' dishes unless there is no IRS.

In view of the report the Council had authorised Homes for Haringey to cap the costs at £400. There will be no opt out as leaseholders had requested. An IRS system will be installed in every building which has a communal system at present. However in future the Council had decided to consult residents as to the type of system which should be installed in their building. There would be two options:

- o Option 1 – the standard system (Freeview TV and DAB radio and Sky+) and
- o Option 2 – the full IRS system (Freeview, Freesat, Sky, Sky+, Sky High Definition services, Turksat (Turkish) and Hotbird (Polish, Italian, French, German and so on.)

When a contractor carries out a survey of a building Homes for Haringey will ask them to prepare prices for both options. Ms Thomas explained that residents will be asked to choose between these two options by voting in a ballot. It remained HfH's view that option 2 provided the best value for money since it provided a large range of choice of channels including foreign language stations. It would ensure that the system could be adapted to future requirements as the technology developed. Homes for Haringey anticipates it may be possible to give residents access to the internet using the new communal digital system. The first option will be bit cheaper she said in view of the fact that it would provide significantly less variety of channels.

The choice between the two options will be decided by the votes of the majority. However Ms Thomas said it was important to note that in a few estates one system served a number of different buildings, so the decision of the majority would then have to include all the blocks it covered. Where this was the case residents would be informed at the time of the ballot. If the cost of option 1 is close to the cost of option 2 (the superior one) Homes for Haringey will let the residents know in advance, so they can take this into account when they cast their votes. Leaseholders felt that in a situation where all those in a block had already agreed to install a cable system, Homes for Haringey should consider the rare third option of allowing that to continue.

Ms Thomas then explained the new stricter policy with respect to residents installing their own satellite dishes. These have been tolerated up until now in view of the lack of choice available through the old communal TV systems. However they are generally in breach of the planning regulations and most have been installed without landlord's permission which is a requirement under both the lease and the tenancy agreement. In future where Homes for Haringey installs the new communal system, it will not allow residents to put up their own dishes she said. They will be taken down at the time the IRS is installed and returned to their owners.

If residents install their own dishes after the new IRS has been installed they will have to pay for their removal. Homes for Haringey will monitor buildings for illegal dishes and it will issue injunctions where necessary. Ms Thomas explained that the policy will be reviewed after 12 months to ascertain its impact. Furthermore where cable television is available HfH will not normally give permission for residents to install their own dishes, even if there is no IRS.

In answer to questions Ms Thomas stated that Homes for Haringey does not expect that the residents of a building will have to pay for the removal of individual satellite dishes. She said the normal position will be that residents who install their own dishes will be personally liable for the costs of their removal. In respect of the block by block consultation every resident will receive a letter to explain the new policies. This means that tenants will be told that they will have to pay for the new IRS as part of their service charges included with their weekly rent.

With regard to the block by block consultation everyone will be invited to a local meeting or drop-in session where officers will be present to answer questions. The policy was to upgrade existing communal systems not to install new communal systems if none was currently available. No consultation will be possible with respect to those residents in buildings where the new IRS is already in place. With regard to the period of payment Mr Thevanesan said that leaseholders would have at least 6 months to pay the bill as part of their actual.

In answer to a question from Mr Kemp, Ms Thomas agreed that the original way the installation of aerials had been carried out had been subject to a lot of criticism from leaseholders and the revised policy now addressed these issues. Tenants will pay the whole of their share for the aerial programme over about ten years at the rate of about 77p per week.

Mr Kemp thanked Ms Thomas for her very informative report.

2. Draft Booklet: 'Your new communal TV service – consulting our residents' – discussion led by Bruce Nicholas, Leasehold Project Officer

Mr Nicholas referred Panel Members to the draft booklet which had been circulated at the beginning of the meeting. He explained that it covered the main areas Ms Thomas had referred to in her talk. Panel Members were invited to make comments and suggestions about its contents. It was noted that residents would generally have the choice to pay the contractor for additional sockets if they wanted them in more than one room. Questions were raised as to the criteria for the location of the sockets and how much they were expected to cost.

- **Action point.** Mr Thevanesan agreed to ascertain the position with the Asset Management Department so that this information could be provided to residents.

The view was expressed that the booklet should contain more information about who to contact should any problems or queries arise – reference was made to queries being dealt with by project management, the resident liaison officer and so on, but no contact details were provided.

- **Action point.** Mr Nicholas agreed to include more information on these matters. Mr Thevanesan also said he would investigate the possibility of setting up a help line.

3. Enhancements to the payment options for major works following the submission of a paper to the Cabinet on the 23 February) – report back from Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership.

Mr Thevanesan began by explaining that in response to requests from the HLA and Panel Members, including the Chair, Mr Kemp, Homes for Haringey had drafted a report to the Council outlining the case for a change in the payment options to give leaseholders longer to pay major works bills. This had become even more relevant in view of the current economic downturn. He summarised the old payment options:

Old options

Interest free loan	
Amount	Monthly instalments
Under £1,119	12
£1200 to £1799	24
Over £1800	36

The following options remain unchanged:

- Discount of 5% for payment in full
- Mandatory loan – secured loan available to anyone during the first 10 years of the lease, interest at the Council’s borrowing rate
- Discretionary loan – means tested, secured loan, interest at 2% above base rate
- Interest-only loan – If a leaseholder is on benefits, the Benefits Agency may agree to pay the interest instalments on an interest only loan from the Council
- Deferred payments loan – charge on the leaseholder’s property. All payments are postponed until the final payment date. This is generally for retired people who are unable to pay by any other way
- Hardship capping. The Council has the discretion to limit major works to £10,000 over 5 years for people who would otherwise suffer severe hardship
- Houseproud loan. A mortgage loan available to the over sixties and the disabled. It is arranged by the Home Improvement Trust and carries a guarantee of no repossession.

New options

Under the new policy the payment options have been considerably extended for leaseholders whose flat is their only home (owner occupiers) – people who sublet can still pay interest free over 36 months:

Interest free loans

Amount	Monthly instalments	Who is entitled
Under £2,000	12	All
£2,000 -£4,999	36	All
£5,000 - £9,999	48	Owner-occupiers only
£10,000 - £14,999	60	Owner-occupiers only
£15,000 and above	72	Owner-occupiers only

Combination loan

In addition homeowners now have the additional option to pay over a longer period with interest for the last 1 or 2 years, as follows:

Amount	Monthly interest-free instalments	Additional monthly instalments with interest	Total monthly instalments
Under £2,000	12	n/a	12
£2,000 -£4,999	36	n/a	36
£5,000 - £9,999	48	12	60
£10,000 - £14,999	60	24	84
£15,000 - £19,999	72	24	96
Above £20,000	72	24	96

Mr Thevanesan said that the new loan arrangements would be introduced on the 5 March. He explained that all loans over £10,000 will have to be secured by a charge on the property. With regard to means tested loans and those on benefits, leaseholders will usually be referred to the Citizens Advice Bureau before a new loan arrangement is set up.

The new loan options are for Owner-Occupiers only i.e. leaseholders who sublet will not be entitled to receive them. In answer to a question from Mr Kemp, Mr Thevanesan said that the new interest free periods will not apply to existing loans. However anyone who is experiencing problems with their repayments should contact Homes for Haringey who are always prepared to consider what can be done, which could include extending the interest-free period.

4. Minutes of the meeting of the 11 February. The minutes were agreed as a true record.

Matters arising

Mr Nicholas reported that Mr Bester had provided the following information in relation to the action points:

- Issuing of final accounts after practical completion

Mr Bester had been advised that three months was not an achievable target for the issue of final accounts. Having discussed the matter with Asset Management, Homes for Haringey is proposing to increase the target from three months to six months. Mr Bester will be circulating this proposal by email to panel members to obtain their views.

- Payment of Decent Homes contractors

The DH contractors are paid by certificate each month for the expenses that have been incurred for each scheme. These costs are monitored by the compliance team. There is no performance bond kept for the end of the defects liability period.

- Applications for windows permission refused planning permission

To date, Homes for Haringey has been advised that four leaseholders have been refused planning permission to install their own windows.

5. Any other business.

Mr Laheen congratulated Mrs Goodhew on her citation for service to residents.

Mr Kemp then thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.