



Leasehold Panel

Minutes of the meeting, 4 November, 2009

1. Attendance: Ms Susanah, Mrs Anne Goodhew, Mrs S Perlman, Ms Maureen Clement, Ms Sue Brown (Chair of Haringey Leaseholders' Association), Mrs M Shaw, Mr Joseph Sefain, Mr B Hines, Mr S Mahony, Mr Roger Kemp, Mr Michael Ruggins, Ms Rita Batzias, Mrs Delsie Grandson, Ms Mary Rawitzer, Ms Millie Mboizi, Ms Annette Joslyn, Ms Lucille Parris, Ms Linda Chrysostomou, Ms Lesley Ramm and Mr Charles Connolly. (20)

Chair: The meeting was chaired by Roger Kemp, (Chair, Leasehold Panel).

Apologies: Mr M Pentol and Ms Eileen Marshall.

Officers: Ms Jacinta Walters, Asset Manager, Ms Pauline Hinds, Strategic Client Representative, Mr Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership and Mr Bruce Nicholas, Leasehold Project Officer who took the minutes.

2. Monitoring satisfaction regarding the Decent Homes programme – Jacinta Walters, Asset Manager

Preparing satisfaction statistics

Ms Walters made a presentation. She explained that the design of the questionnaire used for obtaining data from leaseholders and residents had been decided by comparing with the questionnaires used by other ALMOs and on best practice.

The questionnaire consists of 7 questions which address two broad areas of satisfaction, with:

- contractor's performance on site;
- the broader issues of consultation, information and responding to problems during the work.

Resident satisfaction she said is one of the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) against which the Decent Homes contractors are measured on a monthly basis. Question 7 is broken down into 10 questions regarding the contractor's performance on site – it is used as the basis for measuring this KPI.

The questionnaires are now handed out at the stage of practical completion for each building. The scores are classified as follows:

very dissatisfied/dissatisfied;

neither satisfied nor dissatisfied;

satisfied/very satisfied.

For a questionnaire to be counted as 'satisfied', 7 or more questions have to be answered as satisfied or very satisfied (4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5).

In year 1 of the decent homes programme (2008/9), the overall satisfaction was 97% scoring as above. The Leasehold Panel questioned the results on the basis that they did not record leaseholders' views separately from those of tenants. The Panel felt that leaseholders often take a different view to that of tenants.

Collecting the survey forms

The Panel considered that the contractors' employees (such as the Resident Liaison Officers) should not be responsible for collecting the completed questionnaires. The current rate of return under this method is 81%, whereas on average it would be less than 20% if people were asked to reply by post. Since the number of residents involved in the survey is fairly small, this would invalidate the results. Hence there is no cost effective alternative to contractor involvement.

Leaseholders had complained when they heard that tenants were receiving the questionnaires – they considered they were being overlooked. However this had occurred because formerly tenants had been given the questionnaire when their internal works had been completed. In future the forms will only be distributed when all the work has been completed and they will be given to all residents in the building.

Monitoring and auditing the results

The contractor must now complete a log of all the forms issued and returned every month. They must return the completed forms to Homes for Haringey. Special software (SNAP) will be used for analysis to identify inconsistencies in the data. Random checks will be carried out including phone calls to residents who have had the forms.

Calculating and analysing the survey results

The surveys for year 2 will be on the basis of the procedures outlined above. Breakdowns will be given of the results as between tenants and leaseholders. Results will also be provided in relation to the questions not required for the KPI.

In view of comments made by the Inspectors made during the recent pre-inspection meetings, it has been decided to include a general question: "How satisfied are you overall with your experience of decent homes?" scored as above on a scale of 1 - 5. The other questions required for the KPI will remain as they are.

Future reporting

- The satisfaction scores reported in future will be calculated on the basis of the new overall question.
- The results will continue to be reported monthly, with more details quarterly. At mid year and end of year results will be provided by scheme as well as by area, including lessons drawn, etc.
- The statistics will continue to be published through Homes Zone, etc.

In answer to a question Ms Walters said that 50 questionnaires had been issued to leaseholders this year to date with 29 returned, a 58% return rate. Mr Thevanesan reported that 60 questionnaires had been sent from the Home Ownership Team (covering satisfaction with the billing process, the works and so on), but none had been returned so far.

Ms Brown said that a contractor had asked a leaseholder who could not speak English to sign a form.

- ❖ **Action point 1.** Mr Thevanesan said he would look into the matter and let Ms Brown know the outcome of his enquiries.

Mr Connolly suggested that the results for last year should be reviewed. Ms Walters replied that there was insufficient information to carry out a review of these figures. Mr Ruggins said that residents should be given 24 hours to return the form, it was not reasonable to expect them to return them on the spot.

- ❖ **Action point 2.** It was agreed to circulate the revised satisfaction questionnaire with the minutes of the meeting.

3. Decent Homes update – Pauline Hinds, Strategic Client Representative

Ms Hinds reported that 940 units had been completed across the borough so far under the decent homes programme during the current year.

Satisfaction levels were as follows:

North Tottenham – 80%;

South Tottenham – 95%;

Wood Green – 97% and

Hornsey – 94%.

The expenditure to date was approximately £70 million which was on budget. Ms Walters reported that a sum of £1.4 million had been allocated to cavity wall insulation as an energy efficiency initiative. It would result in minimal costs to leaseholders.

Ms Brown raised the issue of the replacement of windows in period properties not situated in conservation areas. She had been informed that sash windows

were being replaced with standard UPVC windows, which would tend to devalue the properties. She referred to reports which cast doubt on the durability of UPVC.

Ms Rawitzer said that leaseholders should be given more choice through some form of legal agreement. Mr Thevanesan responded that leaseholders had the option to replace their own windows if they chose to do so before Homes for Haringey proposed to carry out the work.

4. Report regarding digital conversion (TV reception) – Anne Goodhew, Vice Chair

Mrs Goodhew reported that she had been informed by Mr Ola Akinfe, Director of Asset Management that the Council was proposing to cap charges, though the amount had not yet been decided. It would be applied retrospectively to all leasehold charges for this work. There would also be a partial opt-out whereby consultation would be carried out amongst the residents in each block as to whether the basic system or the 13 wire system should be installed. This information had been subsequently confirmed in an email to Ms Brown from Councillor Kober, Leader of the Council.

Ms Ramm commented that tenants would generally be inclined to vote for the 13 wire system. However Mrs Goodhew pointed out that under the Council's policy tenants would also have to contribute towards the cost of the system.

5. Report from the annual general meeting of Haringey Leaseholders' Association – Sue Brown, Chair, HLA

The HLA AGM was held on 22 October in the Council Chamber and was very well attended – over 100 leaseholders had been present. The year had seen very good progress, thanks to all the support from its members.

The HLA had been working with Homes for Haringey in various areas and it had been officially recognised by the HfH Board as an umbrella organisation. Thanks were due Ms Brown said to HfH for the ways in which it had listened and cooperated on various issues. HLA committee members would be participating in a working group to be set up by HfH to look at the poor results from the last leaseholders' survey and what could be done to improve leaseholders' satisfaction.

The annual grant from HfH to the HLA of £700 was totally inadequate. Discussions were ongoing with Homes for Haringey about increasing the HLA's funding. The proper level of funding would enable them to carry out activities such as running an advice service for leaseholders, employing professional

advisers. The HLA had presented a business case to HfH for the introduction of an annual levy on service charges for leaseholders to support the HLA and HfH's response was awaited she said.

The HLA had set up a Service Charge sub-group, meeting monthly to look at the methods and accuracy of the calculation of HfH charges for its services. They had also set up an IT subgroup which had been working hard to try to improve the information on their website which was their main method of communication with their members. They would welcome volunteers for either sub-group.

A major part of the AGM Ms Brown continued, had been concerned with discussing the Council's policy for the conversion of the digital TV aerials. The HLA had of course been in the forefront of this debate, writing to the press and working with members of the Leasehold Panel. The guest speaker had been Frances Kneller, Head of Housing and Property at Digital UK who had given a very interesting presentation on the topic of the digital switchover, explaining the technical options. She had agreed that consultation was very important.

Ms Brown had reported to the AGM that the Council was considering a policy for capping the charges for digital conversion and consultation on a block by block basis. Information had been given to the HLA which had been obtained under the Freedom of Information Act about the average costs of the work in other boroughs and the results so far had shown that the average cost was much higher in Haringey. There had been a call-in by Councillors (members of the opposition) of the Council's policy by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The HLA welcomed this though they of course had to remain completely non-political.

A motion was put to the meeting in favour of an individual opt-out; consultation on a block by block basis; and a capped charge of no more than the average charged by the other 32 London Boroughs, applied retrospectively. This was passed by an overwhelming majority, with none against. It was also agreed that Councillor Bevan, Cabinet Member for Housing was incorrect in suggesting that HLA members had ever voted in favour of the Council's policy. Following this Ms Brown said she had written again to Councillor Kober, who had then written to her to tell her that they would be notifying leaseholders of the Council's decision in relation to capping and block by block consultation.

Ms Brown said that the AGM had then turned to the subject of the payment options for major works. Since leaseholders were now paying in advance, HfH were making significant gains in terms of the interest they were gaining. In addition many leaseholders were finding it difficult to obtain bank loans. The following motion Ms Brown said was passed unanimously: leaseholders believed the interest-free period on payments for major works should be

extended from three to five years (to bring Haringey into line with Islington) and leaseholders should be allowed to take advantage of the interest-free period even if they are not able to pay off the full sum within three years.

The election results were as follows: Sue Brown re-elected Chair and Lynne Zilkha re-elected Treasurer. Alena Breckova was elected Vice Chair and Emeka Ekeowa as Secretary. With regard to committee members seven had agreed to continue and four new volunteers came forward making a total of 15, the maximum under the Constitution. Ms Brown said that the minutes of the AGM would be provided on the HLA website shortly and also a copy of Ms Kneller's presentation.

The question arose as to the presentation Ms Kneller had made earlier in the year to the Council on the subject of digital conversion. Mrs Goodhew reported that Ms Kneller had agreed she had told Haringey Council that the 13 wire system had the advantage that it provided the most comprehensive service to residents.

Mr Thevanesan congratulated Ms Brown on her re-election and also the committee. He also thanked Ms Brown for her involvement. He said that Homes for Haringey was clearly committed to working with the HLA in improving services to leaseholders.

6. Minutes of the meeting of the 7 October

Mrs Delsie Grandson reported that her apologies for not attending had not been recorded. The minutes were then agreed as a true record. There were two matters arising. Mr Nicholas reported that in response to the information requested by the Panel there had been 11 observations made in response to the first section 20 notice (issued by Homes for Haringey last year) concerning the Council's policy on digital conversion.

Secondly Mrs Goodhew asked for the Panel's support in writing to Councillor Bevan for further clarification about the Council's policy on the subject of digital conversion. This was agreed unanimously.

7. Impact assessment 2009/10 - to consider the outcomes from the sublet working group

Mrs Goodhew led a short discussion. The following points were agreed in relation to the questionnaires on the form:

Questions:

- What was the aim of setting up the working group? To develop an improved service for leaseholders

- Was this achieved? It is still ongoing and good progress is being achieved.
- Was anything done specifically in relation to minority groups? Not specifically.
- What things have changed as a result of the work of this group?
 - A post registration pack has been drafted for sublessees
 - 840 non registered sublets have been identified
 - Tenancy Management Officers are going to carry out welcome visits for sublessees in future.
- Has the approach of the service provider changed as a result of this activity? It is expected there will be changes in future as described above.
- What impact has this activity had on costs?
 - Venue hire, refreshments, etc? None for venue, £15 for refreshments.
 - Volunteer time (in hours). Approximately 36 hours in total to date (6 meetings x 2 hours x 3 leaseholders)
 - Staff time (average cost) – about 60 hours – approx £1,500
 - How many people attended working group meetings? – On average 8 people.
 - How many people will be affected by the activity? – Approximately 1 600 initially.

The above results were agreed by the Leasehold Panel.

7. Issues deferred to the next meeting

It was agreed to defer the following issues to the next meeting:

- Annual Participants' Questionnaire. Proposals and suggestions from Panel Members to address issues and problems highlighted in the report (pages 31 to 32).
- Result of the 2008/9 impact assessment on the payment options (report). A report provided by Mr Joe Boake, Senior Resident Involvement Officer was deferred to the next meeting.

Mr Nicholas referred to the fact that the next meeting would be on the 2 December. Paul Bridge, Chief Executive and Jackie Thomas, Executive Director of Housing Management had agreed to attend to discuss the agenda for the Forum to be held next year. Ms Brown proposed that the Panel should also discuss the question of when the Forum should take place. This was agreed.

There was no other business. Mr Kemp thanked Ms Walters, Ms Hinds and Ms Brown for their very interesting reports and declared the meeting closed.