



Leasehold Panel

Minutes – 7 October 2009

List of the documents appended to the Minutes

The following documents are referred to in the minutes of the meeting of the 7 October 2009:

1. Mrs Goodhew's letter expressing the Panel's views against the Council's policy, which she had sent to Haringey MPs, the MEP and all Councillors
2. The standard letter for Panel members who wanted to support the arguments contained in Mrs Goodhew's letter to MPs, Councillors
3. Report on improving the communal repairs service, Ruth Buckingham, Project Manager, Best Value Team

Leasehold Panel

Minutes of the meeting, 7 October 2009

1. Attendance: Miss M Merrick, Mrs Anne Goodhew (Vice Chair, Leasehold Panel), Ms Rita Batzias, Ms Shirley Perlman, Ms Alena Breckova, Ms Anne Crellin, Ms Sue Brown (Chair, Haringey Leaseholders' Association), Ms Yvonne Thompson, Mr L Ogonade-Paul, Mrs Freda Ogunade-Paul, Mr Charles Connolly, Mr Michael Ruggins, Ms Susanah Adewumi and Ms Millie Mboizi. (14)

Chair: The meeting was chaired by Mrs Anne Goodhew (Vice Chair, Leasehold Panel).

Apologies: Mr Roger Kemp (Acting Chair), Ms Sylvia Morgan.

Officers: Mr Ola Akinfe, Executive Director of Asset Management, Mr Nesan Thevanesan, Head of Home Ownership, Mr Paul Cox, Senior Home Ownership Officer, Mr Joe Boake, Senior Resident Involvement Officer, Mr Bruce Nicholas, Leasehold Project Officer, who took the minutes.

2. Digital conversion and the Decent Homes Programme - Ola Akinfe, Executive Director of Asset Management

Mr Akinfe began his talk by saying he was glad to be able to take up the Panel's invitation to clarify some issues relating to these matters. He was very aware of the strong feelings which quite a lot of leaseholders held on the subject. The new framework agreement regarding the installation of integrated reception systems (for communal TV) would start in December. He said that most Panel Members were probably aware that the Council had recently re-confirmed its commitment to option 4 (the 13 wire system of the integrated reception system - IRS).

Homes for Haringey would therefore continue to implement option 4. It planned to consult with residents on the implementation of this policy and give them as much information as possible. It was continuing to work closely with its contractors to complete the digital switchover by 2012. He said that about 8,000 properties still required to be converted. The estimated costs under the framework agreement were £530 where external cabling was possible and £600

where it had to be installed inside the building. Internal installation would be necessary if the outside was structurally unsuitable.

Mr Akinfe explained that the Council was still in the process of finalising the manner in which the digital switchover would be completed. He was advised that Members were still in the process of considering the details of the implementation of the policy and the extent to which leaseholders' concerns could be addressed. He understood that a report was being prepared for the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Monday, the 26th of October.

Panel Members stated that they were strongly in favour of leaseholders being allowed to opt out. The only acceptable alternative was for the charges to be limited (or capped) at a reasonable amount. Ms Crellin said that although these were acceptable 'fall back' positions, the real issue in her view was how and why the Council had decided on such a high specification and the lack of consultation. Mr Akinfe responded that the policy was agreed in about 2005 (by the Housing Management Board), so it had been decided before Homes for Haringey had been set up.

The question was raised as to how many observations had been made in response to the first Section 20 Notice which had been sent to leaseholders in the previous year (2008).

❖ **Action point. Mr Thevanesan said he would report back to the next meeting on the number of responses to the first notice.**

In answer to a question regarding consultation, Mr Akinfe answered that residents would be consulted about the location of the sockets and the cabling. However he said that the cabling would normally be kept to a minimum. Mr Connolly asked what the policy was with regard to the installation of IRS in buildings currently without a communal system. Mr Akinfe responded that the main priority was to upgrade the existing systems.

Ms Brown enquired whether an impact assessment had been carried out in relation to this policy. Mr Akinfe replied that it was the invariable policy of the Council and Homes for Haringey to carefully consider the impact of all new policies during the preparation of reports on new policies and the drafting of tender reports for the Procurement Committee. The minutes of the Committee would also indicate if there had been any additional issues relating to such matters.

From the Chair Mrs Goodhew thanked Mr Akinfe for his interesting talk.

3. Reports from Anne Goodhew, Vice Chair:

a. Report from a deputation to the Council meeting on the 1 October regarding digital conversion

Mrs Goodhew and Ms Crellin reported they had attended a meeting of the Council's Scrutiny and Overview Committee on the 1st of October together with Ms Brown and Rita Batzias. They had explained to the Committee that leaseholders continued to be very opposed to the 13 wire IRS system, which they said provided far more channels than the overwhelming majority of the Council's residents would ever use. They re-stated the case for an opt-out and/or a cap of £300 on the charges to leaseholders for this work (to be applied retrospectively). They said that the Council should urgently reconsider its policy on these matters.

The Liberal Democrat Councillors present had also argued strongly for this approach. However Councillor Bull, the Chair of the Committee had moved on behalf of the Council that the existing policy should be confirmed and this was carried on condition that the Scrutiny Committee should receive regular reports on the subject. The first of these was scheduled to be made at its meeting on the 26th of October, on the progress of the Decent Homes Programme including a 'report on the feasibility of including opt-out options for leaseholders in respect of the IRS system'.

Mrs Goodhew then referred the Panel to a copy of her letter ([Appendix 1](#)) expressing the Panel's views against the Council's policy, which she had sent to Haringey MPs, the MEP and all Councillors. She explained that Panel Members could use the standard letter ([Appendix 2](#)) she had drafted for if they wanted to support the arguments contained in her letter to MPs, Councillors, etc. She noted that the standard letter had already been emailed to some Panel Members and asked those present to complete it with their details and send copies to their Councillors and to encourage other leaseholders to do the same.

Mrs Goodhew also reported she had written to Councillor Bevan on these matters but had not yet had the courtesy of a reply. Ms Crellin said she fully agreed with the points made by Mrs Goodhew. The basic problem was the very high specification the Council had chosen, substantially higher than other boroughs. Ms Brown reported that she had written on behalf of the HLA to Councillor Gideon Bull registering strong objections to Cllr Bevan's response at the Scrutiny Committee and to the Council's support of his policy.

- ❖ **Action point: In response to a suggestion from Mrs Goodhew Mr Thevanesan said he would circulate copies of her letters by email to Panel Members for them to register their opposition.**

Mrs Goodhew encouraged Members of the Panel to attend the next Scrutiny Committee at 6pm on the 26th of October, and asked anyone who already had adequate digital TV reception from cable or from the existing communal TV aerial to also write to their Councillors asking why they should be asked to pay for an additional very expensive system.

b. Update from Sublet group. Mrs Goodhew presented a short report, the main points of which were as follows:

Post registration pack:

The draft of the pack was nearly complete. It would include:

- Information for **leaseholders** subletting their property
- Information pack for **sub lessees**.

It would be sent by post to all registered sub-lessees. All new sub-lessees would receive a welcome visit from their Tenancy Management Officer.

Assistance from other Council departments: 840 properties had been identified from Council Tax records as apparently having different residents from the leasehold records in the Home Ownership Team. These leaseholders had been sent letters asking whether they had sublet their flats and would therefore require to register them. This had resulted in a number of additional properties being registered.

Advice day for leaseholders subletting: This is under consideration. It was also proposed that a questionnaire should be sent to all private landlords asking what sort of information they would like to receive.

Newsletter for sub-lessees: This proposal had been set aside on the grounds of cost. Instead it had been suggested to send all sub-lessees a copy of Home Zone.

Recovery of administration costs: The estimated cost of the work in the Home Ownership Team required for processing sublets had been estimated in the sum of £30,000 to £40,000.

It was noted that it had been agreed at the meeting on the 28th July that the cost of this administrative work would be spread over tenants and leaseholders and added to the management fee as part of the annual service charge.

4. Annual elections to the Chair and Vice Chair.

- **Chair of the Leasehold Panel**

It was noted that although Mr Kemp was on holiday he had informed the Panel he was willing to continue chairing meetings in the absence of anyone else putting their name forward. He was confirmed in post with no votes against and one abstention.

- **Vice Chair of the Leasehold Panel**

Mrs Goodhew indicated that she would be prepared to continue in this position. The Panel agreed her appointment to the post with no votes against and one abstention.

5. Nominations to the Working Group for the Residents' Jury. Mr Thevanesan explained that a working group was going to be set up to consider the terms of reference of the proposed Residents' Jury. The Panel was entitled to nominate to this group. Mrs Goodhew and Ms Brown both expressed an interest and their nominations were agreed.

6. Key Leaseholder Scheme – update from Paul Cox, Senior Home Ownership Officer

Mr Cox reported that about 90 leaseholders had put their names forward to join the scheme. A booklet had been drafted to explain how the scheme would work and the main terms of reference and this had been circulated to the working group. It would be circulated by email to Members of the Panel shortly.

With reference to the draft booklet, Ms Brown expressed disapproval of the fact that there was no reference to Key Leaseholders receiving copies of the reports made on services by the Estate Service Managers. She believed that an important aspect of the work of the Key Leaseholders should be to have a role in monitoring such matters.

Mr Thevanesan responded that the primary purpose of the scheme was to monitor the charges for day to day repairs to address any problems that might arise before the issue of the Actual Charges after the end of the financial year. It was clear from the booklet he said that the scheme's terms of reference allowed for a broadening of its scope but only after it had been properly established.

Ms Crellin spoke in agreement: other things could be brought into the scheme at a later stage. It was important to see whether people could commit the time and effort to make the scheme work properly for checking day to day repairs first. If it attempted to work on too many fronts, this could endanger its

success. Mr Thevanesan said that further down the line the scheme could get involved in other matters including estate improvements and major works issues. It was also important to make sure that each function had been thoroughly thought through before it was introduced.

7. Impact assessment – Panel to review the take up and response to the new major works options following the issue of decent homes invoices – Joe Boake, Senior Resident Involvement Officer

Mr Boake circulated a questionnaire to the Panel to ascertain their views on the improvements to the new payment options for major works. He asked Panel Members to return the completed questionnaires at the end of the meeting. He said he would provide a written report to the next meeting on the results of the questionnaire.

8. Improving the communal repairs service – Ruth Buckingham, Project Manager, Best Value Team

Ms Buckingham commenced by noting that the Leasehold Panel had been represented on the Project Group by Mr Piers Johnson, who had made a very useful contribution to its work. She then guided the Panel through the report (Appendix 3) which had been circulated with the agenda at the start of the meeting.

Panel Members responded positively to the findings and conclusions contained in the report. Ms Crellin expressed the general view when she observed that it often took a rather long time for a communal repair to be completed. The question was asked as to who was generally responsible for undertaking this work – Ms Buckingham replied that although some work was contracted out most was carried out by the in-house Repairs Service.

There was also general agreement that there was a problem with recurring repairs for example blocked drains or roof leaks. Ms Buckingham advised this was a problem Homes for Haringey was aware of. Part of this project would be to look at how to identify recurring problems and to have a more planned approach to dealing with them.

Mr Boake made a suggestion to include as part of the project feedback from Residents Association representatives and advocates in relation to communal repairs issues. Ms Buckingham agreed to look at adding this to the improvement plan.

Mrs Goodhew thanked Ms Buckingham from the Chair for her interesting report.

9. Minutes of the meeting of the 9 September

The minutes were approved as a true record. There were no matters arising.

10. To consider possible subjects for Homes Zone (copy deadline, December issue, 23rd October)

- Mrs Goodhew suggested that it would be a good idea if there could be an article on the subject of the digital conversion
- Ms Brown suggested an article on the annual general meeting of the HLA.

Mr Thevanesan said he would see what could be included.

11. Any other business.

- **Forward plan for subjects to be discussed at the Leasehold Panel.** This was agreed but there was no time to agree the dates of future meetings (after November).
- **Six volunteers for the Audit Commission Focus Group**
The following names were agreed: Ms Sue Brown, Mrs Delsie Grandson, Ms Anne Crellin, Mr Roger Kemp, Ms Alena Breckova and Mrs Anne Goodhew.
- **Some volunteers to meet with Paul Bridge to arrange a meeting of the Leaseholders' Forum late November.**

The following names were agreed: Ms Sue Brown, Ms Anne Crellin, Mr Roger Kemp, Ms Alena Breckova and Mrs Anne Goodhew.

- **Recognition of the HLA** – Mr Boake reported that the HLA had been recognised as an umbrella group by the Board of Homes for Haringey.

Mrs Goodhew then closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

APPENDIX 1

For the attention of Haringey MPs, MEP and all Councillors
28 September 2009

Re: HfH Leaseholders and IRS (digital tv aerial) installation

I am writing as Vice Chair of Homes for Haringey Leasehold Panel which is the officially constituted forum for consultation between Homes for Haringey and Homes for Haringey leaseholders as required by the Audit Commission. The subject of this e-mail is our continuing dispute with Haringey Council and specifically with Cllr Bevan as Cabinet Member for Housing on the matter of the installation of IRS.

On August 8th the Cabinet ratified Cllr Bevan's decision to install an expensive 13 wire system for digital television reception throughout Haringey Borough. This occurred despite the deputation from the Leasehold Panel to the full council on July 20th and the ongoing controversy highlighted in the local press which must have raised concerns.

It is our understanding that neither the full council nor the cabinet are under any obligation to rubber stamp a single councillor's project so we must assume that, for some reason, Cabinet Members did not feel empowered to stand up against a plan which has obvious flaws and about which residents were not properly consulted. We also assume that this ratification has been backdated as Cllr Bevan had failed to check that a clear audit trail existed from the time of the decision by the then Housing Management Board through to his own individual decision as Cabinet Member for Housing.

The original plan was mooted well before the existence of the ALMO. The decision was taken by a body which may have had authority then but which ceased to exist some years ago. It was replaced by the ALMO, Homes for Haringey, which is not a decision making body.

Everything in respect of this scheme must surely therefore be deemed illegal. Cllr Bevan has obviously only recently realised this and has sought cabinet ratification to legalise the situation. In other words, the cart was put before the horse and the attempt to correct this has been done behind our backs and should be deemed unacceptable by any council with a right moral sense. Haringey Councillors are meant to serve the community in an honourable way. How is this situation honourable?

Effectively Homes for Haringey leaseholders in years 1 & 2 of the Decent Homes Programme have been illegally charged sums from £280 to £1,148 with no consultation, no tendering and no transparency. Under the new procurement which will be in place for 2010 we will pay at least £530. In other boroughs charges are as low as £230 and none higher than £414. In Islington leaseholders have been allowed to opt-out, in other boroughs their payments have been capped. As HfH leaseholders, we are seeking an opt-out and/or a cap of £300.

Please do something to redeem the image we now have of Haringey Council by standing up for your constituents against Cllr Bevan's plan.

Anne Goodhew, Vice Chair, Homes for Haringey Leasehold Panel (dated 28/09/09)

APPENDIX 2

Dear

Re: HfH Leaseholders and IRS (digital tv aerial) installation

I understand that you have recently received an e-mail from Anne Goodhew, Vice Chair of HfH Leasehold Panel, concerning the on-going dispute between HfH leaseholders and Haringey Council, specifically Cllr Bevan as Cabinet Member for Housing.

As one of your constituents and an HfH leaseholder I am writing to ask for your support in this matter and would value a written response from you as to what action you are prepared to take on my behalf.

Yours faithfully

APPENDIX 3

Communal Repairs Presentation - Repairs Service Leasehold Panel (7 October 2009)

1. Background

- Repairs Panel highlighted the fact that the communal repairs service received by tenants was not satisfactory.
- The project team agreed the project would undertake the following objectives relating to residents:
 - Ensure all stakeholders including staff and residents understand what a communal repair is
 - Agree ownership of the communal repairs process and responsibility for communicating progress with residents.
 - Communicate more effectively with residents and staff to ensure residents expectations are managed more effectively and are informed if a job has been completed and the reasons for a job not being completed.
 - Ensure resident satisfaction with communal repairs is being monitored and that satisfaction improves.

2. What have we done?

- Set up a project which looked at the current process and associated problems.
- Established a customer journey map involving representatives for the repairs and leaseholders panel.
- Looked at how other housing organisations undertake communal repairs.
- Developed a new process map and worked out the changes required to implement the new process.

3. Customer Journey Mapping used to (see note on page 2):

- confirm the need to communicate throughout the process in particular about timescales
- ensure feedback is given if there are delays and/or if the problem is a recurring one.
- ensure satisfaction is monitored so further problems can be addressed.

4. Suggested solutions(amongst many other internal suggestions) include:

- All literature relating to communal repairs is updated and changes are communicated to residents
- All residents and staff to phone the repairs Contact Centre directly to report a communal repair
- Use a new computer system (using customer relationship management – see note below) to record resident/staff contacts and feedback to individuals where there are problems completing the repairs.
- In addition, to feedback reasons for outstanding repairs to current resident monitors and key leaseholders.

- Use Estate Bulletins to update residents on outstanding communal repairs.
 - Use Call Centre staff to phone a sample of individuals reporting repairs to check satisfaction levels and also ask resident monitors/key leaseholders to complete communal repair satisfaction slips. Estate Services Officers will drop satisfaction slips to residents if required.
 - Overall ownership of the process be given to Estate Services and repairs Estates team.
 - Use the information on the CRM system to track recurring problems.
 - Improve communication with residents relating to scaffolding.
 - Investigate the use of 'estate action days' to ensure communal repairs reported through estate inspections are completed as soon as possible.
5. **Are there any other issues in the customer journey you think I may have missed?**
 6. **Any further suggestions relating to the solutions?**

Thank you

Ruth Buckingham, Project Manager, Tel: 020 8489 4614
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Explanation of terms:

Customer journey mapping is the process of tracking and describing all the experiences that customers have as they encounter a service or set of services, taking into account not only what happens to them, but also their responses to their experiences. Its purpose is to reveal opportunities for improvement and innovation in that experience, acting as a way of ensuring that every interaction with the customer is as positive as it can be.

Customer relationship management (CRM) is concerned with the methods companies use to interact with their customers. These methods relate to employee training and special purpose CRM software for the recording and analysis of data collected with respect to customer transactions. Thus there is an emphasis on how incoming customer phone calls, emails and letters are handled, processed and responded to.