



MINUTES

Haringey Leaseholders' Association (HLA) General Meeting

Held on Friday, 20th March 2009 in the Public Chamber, Civic Centre, Wood Green

In attendance - approximately 100 leaseholders

Committee

Sue Brown (Chair)

Nick Martin Clark (Chair, HfH Leasehold Panel)

Anne Crellin

Delsie Grandson

Catrina Zahoor (Membership Secretary) (Minutes)

Lynne Zilkha (Treasurer)

Scott Russell (S/C Sub Committee)

Rita Batzias

Ayten Goknel

Guests

Paul Bridge, HfH, CEO

Cllr. John Bevan, Cabinet Member for Housing Services

Jackie Thomas, Executive Director of Housing Management

Ola Akinfe, Executive Director of Asset Management

Chris Graham; London Leaseholders' Network (Photographer)

Selim Buyukdogan (IT Manager)

The meeting was opened by Sue Brown at 19:10

1. Introduction

Sue Brown (SB) thanked everyone for coming and advised that photographs would be taken for the HLA website and asked if anyone objected to make themselves known.

SB said that Paul Bridge, Jackie Thomas and John Bevan would be speaking and taking question and thanked them for attending.

2. Satisfaction Survey

SB read out statistics from the recent Leaseholder Survey conducted by BMG Research on behalf of Homes for Haringey (HfH) at the end of the previous year, as follows:

46% of leaseholders were dissatisfied with the overall service provided by the landlord.

Only 30% were satisfied.

Satisfaction with value for money for service charges was 20%, down from 45% in 2005/6.

73% said improvement was needed on value for money for service charges.

Satisfaction with the local neighbourhood was down to 51% from 77% in 2003/4.

Satisfaction that major works provide value for money was only 20% satisfied, 52% dissatisfied.

68% were dissatisfied with the level of charge/cost.

50% were dissatisfied with the consultation.

Only 23% were satisfied with communal repairs and maintenance

Only 27% were satisfied that HfH were taking leaseholders' views into account, down from 67% in 2005/6

Satisfaction with opportunities for participation in management and decision-making was 26% satisfied, down from 52% in 2005/6.

SB requested that any Leaseholders who had not received a "Customer satisfaction form" to fill in from a Contractor at the end of the Decent Homes project work on their estate should report this to the HLA.

3. Leaseholder Sub Groups

SB apologised for any perceived lack of contact/action but explained that the HLA had been very busy for the last few months dealing with administrative matters, partially brought on by HfH.

SB pointed out that it was easy for one person, or even a handful, to be ignored but by coming together as a group, 1,000 would have to be listened to and leaseholders had to band together to have any chance of being heard and, more importantly, being able to influence decisions.

SB stated that unfortunately the HLA did not have the resources to deal with leaseholder's individual issues but would lend support and encouragement for leaseholders to form their own sub-groups which could then affiliate with the HLA, as has already started to happen. The groups could become more formal and could liaise with the HLA, lending strength both ways.

4. Decent Homes Programme

Leaseholders who wish to find out when their property/estate was scheduled for works under the Decent Homes programme could visit the HLA website [www.haringeyleaseholders.org.uk] and click the link in the Decent Homes section.

For leaseholders who were interested in replacing their own windows, the HLA was looking at window installation companies with a view to maybe producing a recommendation list in due course.

5. Service Charge Sub-Committee

Scott Russell (SR) reported that he was forming an HLA Service Charge sub-committee and was in need of volunteers. He recounted his experience in tackling unreasonable charges which resulted in reductions and rebates to his individual account. He stressed that, as a group, the impact would obviously be better and he would like to tackle all aspects of the service charges for the benefit of all leaseholders. It was anticipated that this sub-committee would meet for approximately 2 hours per month. Meetings would take place in committee members' homes.

Leaseholders interested in joining this group should make contact with the HLA via an email on their website or leave a message on 0845 020 4252.

6. Digital Aerials

Anne Crellin (AC) spoke about her analysis of the current installation of digital aerials on her and other estates. A synopsis of her statement is attached to and forms part of these minutes [page 6].

Her estimate for this work is £722. Her MP, Lynne Featherstone, received a response to her enquiry to the effect that the Government's recommendation for installation costs is c. £300 per flat and, co-incidentally, a meeting had been arranged between HfH and DigitalUK on the 27th February 2009 to look at costs and AC would like to know what the outcome of this meeting was.

AC is aware that another block has seen documentation showing that no competitive tenders were received, and which included a 100% mark up on the price.

HfH advised that the work is being carried out now because they were taking advantage of scaffolding which had been erected to complete the Decent Homes work; although on some blocks access could be gained to the roof without the need for scaffolding.

AC was concerned that, by having two systems installed until the official changeover in 2012, leaseholders could be charged for two maintenance charges.

She felt that certain channels being given as standard should be opted into, if required, and that if some minority channels/groups were being catered for, why not all?

7. Partnership with Homes for Haringey

Nick Martin-Clark (NMC) spoke about the relationship between the HLA and HfH, our landlord's managing agent, and the fact that the HLA and HfH needed to start to working well together and creating a relationship which could be a productive partnership for all involved. He pointed out that unfortunately the HLA lost a lot of rights during the dispensation hearing and now had to rely a lot on HfH's goodwill.

NMC pointed out some positives which had occurred within the last 12 months which did enhance HLA's operation and in turn leaseholders:

- a. HfH assisted with HLA Constitution changes
- b. Official recognition by HfH
- c. Free meeting room use at the Civic Centre
- d. £700 a year funding
- e. Free assistance with our mailings
- f. HLA has representation on the CORE group for Constructor Partners
- g. HLA successfully lobbied HfH to enable leaseholders to install their own windows and doors

NMC stressed that the HLA wanted to make a genuine contribution to the well-being of leaseholders but it was proving to be a formidable task. He stressed that the HLA were only a handful of volunteers who provided what little spare time they had but were up against HfH, their constructor partners and both with a complement of full time staff.

The HLA would like to have access to professional legal advice and a surveyor but could not afford it. The HLA's funds currently stood at c. £3,700 which was mainly made up by the 150 or so leaseholder subscribers and the HfH funding arrangement. Basically the HLA needed money to be able to provide any type of service to leaseholders and that is why the HLA was now asking HfH to consider a change to their current system of funding. This would entail all leaseholders having the option to "opt-out" of paying the HLA annual subscription of £20 and actually pay this amount, along with the service charges, to HfH which would then be sent on to the HLA.

The point being made was that if every leaseholder paid an annual sub of £20, the HLA would have funds of c. £80,000 a year which would completely change the service HLA could offer leaseholders.

Jackie Thomas (JT) responded to this suggestion later on in the meeting by saying that HfH would not be collecting any subscriptions the "opt-out" way because of the experience which Homes for Islington encountered when they did the same for the ILA (Islington Leaseholders' Association) where a leaseholder complained about the process and took them to the LVT. JT did agree to discuss funding options with NMC.

8. Paul Bridge

Paul Bridge (PB) had been invited to take questions but unfortunately had to leave at 8pm so only had time to say that, since the AGM in September, he had met with more leaseholders, received emails and met them at his office. He welcomed the working partnership that NMC spoke of. PB did promise to discuss the funding ideas with colleagues. He also made the comment that he welcomed the forming of the service charge sub-committee.

9. Cllr. John Bevan

John Bevan (JB) introduced himself by explaining that the Government had insisted the management of local government housing changed, which prompted the formation of HfH and, as Cabinet Member for Housing, his remit was to monitor the progress of the Council's housing stock, along with three other managers.

JB admitted that they were focusing on satellite dishes which he advised were illegally placed on the Council's properties, and added that satellite dishes were dangerous as they could fall from the building hurting people below and would cause the insurance costs to increase. He also spoke of metal grills which were placed in front of front doors which were also illegal and would be removed. HfH could now tackle these issues and they intended to remove all satellite dishes throughout the borough. They also intended replacing front doors which did not meet fire regulations.

He stated that, when the scaffolding was erected, it would be used for convenience to do the satellite and new aerial work.

He mentioned that the Campsbourne Estate's charge for the aerials was c. £360, which is the average price in London for the installation, but admitted that this will vary specifically where scaffolding is not required for the Decent Homes work.

Although he was not invited to comment on the agenda, JB said that he objected to the term "How to Fight Back".

10. Questions and Answers

Jackie Thomas and John Bevan were invited to take questions.

- a. Lynne Zilkha – Asked of JB, who were the 3 monitor managers he referred to earlier?
Answer: by JB, He did not recall their names and invited Ms. Zilkha to email him and he would respond.
- b. Giuseppe, Carlton Lodge – Complained about the kitchen fans being installed by Waites as part of the Decent Homes programme which were adjacent to his bedroom window as this was going to be a big problem for him in the future because of the noise they emit.
Answer: by SB, It was pointed out that individual cases could not be dealt with during this meeting and that this matter would have to be taken up with HfH outside the meeting.
- c. Builder, Elgar House – Complained emphatically about the cost of scaffolding to his block which was in excess of £25,000. As he is in the trade he is aware that this is massively excessive.
Answer: by JT, she does not have the answer and invited the leaseholder to see her at the end of the meeting.
- d. Leaseholder, Newland House – Made a point about the scaffolding being taken down before the digital aerials were put up and wants to know what the difference in the quote would be.
Answer: By JT, this is being reviewed.
- e. Leaseholder with a 2 bed flat – Made a statement referring to JB's comments about the insurance v. satellite dishes and the residents who are causing the insurance to go up because they have their own dishes; why are they not dealt with accordingly?
Answer: by JB, the insurance had not gone up, he just said what might happen – not what did happen.
- f. Ditto – She was very surprised about the HLA only receiving £3,000 per annum from leaseholders and felt that if every leaseholder agreed to pay £2 a month through their service charge this would be of great benefit and barely noticeable by the leaseholder.
Answer: by JT, advised that this issue had been raised with them and HfH did look into it but, because of the issue that Islington encountered, HfH decided against this as an option as the ILA were taken to a Leasehold Valuation Tribunal. JT confirmed that they were going to look at other options.

A vote was taken of all present as to how many people would be happy to pay a contribution for the HLA through their service charges. The vote was overwhelmingly in favour.

- g. Leaseholder, Miller House – Stated that the recent Decent Homes survey results showed that 96% of residents in her block were satisfied but she did not know of one leaseholder who received a questionnaire. She wished to know how the surveys are conducted?
Answer: by JB, he had received a petition about Apollo, who he assumes she was talking about, and they were investigating this Contractor.
- h. Leaseholder, Burgage House – Wanted to know what the criteria was for changing a flat roof to a pitched roof, especially when there was seemingly nothing wrong with the flat roof?
Answer: by JB, a roof needed replacing if the surveyor says it needs replacing. Flat roofs had a short life span and pitched roofs last for ages plus there was reduced heat loss.
- i. Leaseholder, Thomas Keats House – They were being charged £38,000 a year for cleaning which they considered to be too much and a service which was not value for money.
Answer: by JT, she would look into the service.
- j. Leaseholder – "What are we paying buildings insurance for? Also, when I report repairs in communal areas, which should be claimed for under the insurance, I am told I cannot because I am in a leasehold flat."
Answer: by JT, the building insurance was not for general repairs and she said she would speak to her afterwards.
- k. Leaseholder – The Government had subsidised the Decent Homes programme and as such the Council were getting leaseholders to pay again. Was there any money for the L/H properties?
Answer: No.
- l. Leaseholder – Would like to have a digital TV point in additional rooms but has been told this could not be done.
Answer: by JT, you could have it but you would have to pay for it direct to the contractor.

- m. Nick Martin-Clark – Could leaseholders opt-out from the digital aerial installation?
Answer: by JB, opting out would make no difference to cost as the cable will be put to the outside of leasehold properties and they would still be charged their share of the communal cost of installation.

At this point a vote was taken on opting out. The majority of leaseholders present voted to have the option of opting out of digital aerial installation.

- n. Leaseholder, Jack Barnett Way – There are 32 properties of which 7 are leasehold and 7 were freehold. Would the freeholders be required to pay towards the cost of installing digital aerials?
Answer: HfH will not be providing them with digital aerials unless they ask for it.
- o. Leaseholder – “I am applying to install my own windows. Landlord permission fee is £268 and Planning Permission fee is £150. Who do I need planning permission?”
Answer: by JT, it was required as the design had to be appropriate for the building and they need to be sure of the life of the windows and the specification. HfH charges are on the lower side in comparison to other ALMOs in London.
- p. Anne Crellin, Carlton Lodge – Correspondence routinely went unanswered. Why?
(There was much agreement from other leaseholders about this question)
Answer: by JT, who apologised and would look into this issue. She said that HfH's standard response time is 2 weeks.
- q. Leaseholder – Scaffolding had been up for 2 months and has not been used. Why are we being charged for it?
Answer: by JB, As he had heard this complaint before, he would investigate by the monitoring officer and would report back to the next meeting.
- r. Leaseholder – Apollo had advised that installation of extra digital extensions into other rooms could not happen.
Answer: by JT, if individuals want additional rooms wired they could have it and would have to pay for it.
- s. Leaseholder – The Decent Homes work was shoddy and very little work was being carried out. The charges were very high, exacerbated by the credit crunch. The banks were refusing to lend money and he owed £18,000. How was he supposed to pay it?
Answer: by JT, She confirmed that JB had received a letter about this and would deal with it. She went on to say that HfH were sympathetic to leaseholders' financial circumstances. The Government has recently said it was going to introduce a 0% interest method of charging and HfH were currently awaiting further information.

Meeting concluded at 9:00 p.m.

Synopsis of Anne Crellin's analysis on Digital Aerials:

Digital Switchover:

- HFH are completing this in two ways: via the Digital Project and also separately under the Decent homes works. The HFH project officer, at a recent Panel meeting did not seem aware some blocks were having this done under the Decent Homes works.
- Estimated cost for those on my estate with Decent Homes estimates is around £720 per household – this is outrageous, criminal even. The government minister, in a recent letter to Lynne Featherstone MP states this should be around £300 per household – a meeting with HFH and DigitalUK was happening Feb 27th 09, to look at costs – what is the outcome?
- Some people already have digital TV via cable at minimum cost – they don't need the external aerial.
- Will the existing system run alongside the new system until switchover in 2012 and will leaseholders be charged for the maintenance of both? If yes, this is unfair and unreasonable?
- Leaseholders received two Section 20 notices, one for aerials and one for D/Homes works but were never made aware that the first one (aerials only) was not relevant for them.
- Some leaseholders were sent a copy of the quote from one company which clearly shows over 100% mark-up that HFH are charging in the estimates – this MUST be checked and sorted out, why should leaseholders have to pay a mark-up?
- Only one company seems to have tendered – leaseholders must be sent copies of the other 3 tenders. HFH has stated the aerials are being completed while the scaffold is on place. At Newlands the scaffold came down before the aerial works were done, at Carlton there is access to the roof without the requirement for scaffold and all other items e.g. windows, kitchens and bathrooms have been carried up and done via the internal staircases - the scaffold has hardly been used.
- HFH have argued that existing dishes damage the building; possibly so but these have been up for many years and it seems rich that suddenly it's a concern; where were HFH when leaseholders have complained about dishes in the past?
- Why should we be asked to pay for extras such as turkstat and hotbird? These should be opt-in items that ALL residents (incl. tenants) have to pay for..... why haven't other 'minority' groups been catered for?