



Minutes of the General Meeting held on Tuesday 10 February 2009
Joseph Court Community Hall at 7 P.M.

Present

Vi Carpenter (VC)- **Chair**

Committee Members

Muriel Gordon (MG)
Ted Johnson
Irene Lewington
Sheila Coxon
Candy Martins
Emma Kelly

Members

W. Carpenter
G. Clarke
P. Whellan
Everlyn Conway
V. Mensah
Mr & Mrs H D Lucas
Jean Johnson
P. Robinson
E. Brett
R. Keene

(Those who did not sign the attendance book could not be recorded as being at the meeting).

In attendance

Judith Morrison – Interim Head of Leasehold and Right to Buy Services
Loulla Timeneys – Team Manager, Pinnacle
Catherine Marie – Leasehold Officer and NELA Administrator
Cllr Maureen Middleton

1) INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Vi Carpenter, (NELA Chairperson,) opened the proceedings at 19.00 hours and welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Shirley Bogan and Peter Naughton

VC welcomed Judith Morrison, Interim Head of Leasehold and Right to buy Services, (Hackney Homes), Loulla Timeneys (Team Manager, Pinnacle) to the meeting and introduced Catherine Marie (Leasehold Officer) who has recently taken over from Diana Otieno.

VC informed all present that Muriel Gordon has unfortunately withdrawn from being the Vice Chair of NELA due to other commitments but she will however, remain as a committee member.

VC informed all that MG had a meeting with Charlotte Graves (CG) (Chief Executive, Hackney Homes) regarding particular issues which include:

- Looking at the procedures in place to provide information that Leaseholders get value for money.
- Refund procedure
- Statement of Accounts
- Job ticket charging
- Communal repairs
- The associations available to Leaseholders
- A one stop shop for Leaseholders.

Charlotte Graves had offered the facility of a quarterly forum of a small group of leaseholders to address particular issues and wanted to know if leaseholders felt this to be a good idea. The meeting thought this would be a useful way forward and Muriel Gordon would go back to Charlotte and advise on the feedback. (MG)

JM asked whether this would include all representatives from the whole borough. She also informed all that the borough wide Leasehold and Freehold Forum would be holding a meeting and would be electing committee members soon. JM suggested that maybe members from NELA would be interested in joining it.

MG said that she was not happy with the borough wide Forum as she did not think it right that leaseholders should be paying to discuss issues with Officers and it was really down to Hackney Homes to ensure that there were systems in place where leaseholders could be assured that their concerns would be addressed.

JM informed that the Forum will be sending out letters to all Leaseholders and Freeholders in the borough for a Special meeting that will be held on 11th March 2009.

VC informed all present that Hackney Homes had received a 2 star accreditation and she congratulated all the staff involved.

2) PREVIOUS MINUTES

The previous minutes of 28 October 2008 were proposed by Muriel Gordon and seconded by Irene Lewington and accepted as a true reflection of matters discussed at the last general meeting.

3) MATTERS ARISING

VC said that this will be brought up during question time with Judith Morrison.

4) UPDATE ON MEETING WITH DIANE ABBOTT MP

VC updated all that Diane Abbott MP and Robin Smith are due to meet. VC said that as of 9th February 2008, Diane had not received a reply from Mayor Jules Pipe and Margaret Beckett.

Diane Abbott is currently away, once she gets back, VC will still be chasing up on an update.

VC said that Diane Abbott will be looking into the large charges that Leaseholders have to pay and that she will lobby her colleagues to see that something is brought before Parliament.

All who attended the meeting with Diane Abbott felt that the meeting went well and when VC gets an update, she will pass it on to all.

VC thanked Rhonda for taking the minutes at the meeting with Diane Abbott.

5) WOODBERRY DOWN UPDATE

VC advised that a meeting had been held with Charlotte Graves, Alan Turner, Surveyors and the Regeneration Team and this was followed by a further meeting with Alan Turner and Gideon Taylor to discuss various repairs issues. It was agreed that Health & Safety repairs would be carried out and interim repairs for Phase 3-5 would take place but leaseholders of the blocks concerned would be consulted before the Section 20 notices were served.

JM said that regarding the Regeneration estates, Cabinet has considered allowing the leaseholders to put a charge on their properties. They have however not yet agreed on a minimum amount. This means that the charge is just deferred and that should the leaseholder sell their property, that charge would need to be paid back, or when the leaseholder dies or the property is bought back by the council.

The charge however, does incur an interest charge which would be around 5%. The charge is irrespective of age, but would be provided to anyone provided the amount is above a certain amount (£2,000-£3,000).

MG said that Robin Smith had informed her that the minimum amount would be around £2,000 but that will be decided once it goes to cabinet. JM said that it had already gone to Cabinet, but the decision had been left to the officers on whether the amount should remain at £3,000 or be reduced to £2,000.

6) GENERAL QUESTION TIME WITH JUDITH MORRISON- INTERIM HEAD OF LEASEHOLD AND INCOME SERVICES

a) English Leases

JM informed all that they have it in mind for the new leaseholders who buy on the Right to Buy scheme to get leases in easy to understand English and not the current Leaseholders.

VC would like all leases to be in plain English and to be made available for current leaseholders as well.

JM said that a guide and/or summary can be provided for the various terminologies in the lease. If the leaseholders believe that it does not meet up with their expectations, they are to let LIS know.

JM will let NELA know about the timescales of making these Leases available at a later date. (JM)

b) Job Tickets

JM explained about the 18 month rule, whereby jobs that are outside this period cannot be recharged. She explained that although they are trying to eradicate mistakes made, a manual system is used and mistakes are bound to occur. They are however working together with Property Services to reduce the errors.

JM said they are working towards moving to using a new IT system, which will change the way repairs are logged and charged back. MG informed all that Pat Ronyane and Susmita Noonan had agreed to a process to produce Quarterly reports, which had initially started to work, Diana Otieno would send out the reports to those who requested them and get back comments but when forwarded to the relevant departments, responses were not forthcoming.

Bob Phillips has said that the reports cannot be made at this particular time, but said he would produce a report in May or June and send it out those who have requested it.

Hopefully, the new system should be up and running in January 2010.

c) VC enquired on why the Actuals for electricity are estimates and not the actual meter readings.

JM said that there are issues with the contractual arrangements with the reading of the meters. That the companies are not always able to get out and read all the meters. JM reiterated that it is not illegal to put the estimated readings on the Actual Service Charge bill.

MG said that she had seen the meter readings and they do not tally and that they are erratic. She does not think that the actuals are any where near to the estimates. She said that Hackney Homes have the clout to get the companies to read all the meters at the end of the financial year and that the charge given should be an actual reading.

JM will investigate and get back to NELA and will look at putting something in place to get things working they way they should be.

d) Statement format

Leaseholders felt that the format for the Statement is not in keeping with what they had been told it would be. The current statement sent out is very lengthy and goes back a couple of years. They would prefer it to go back one year and to clearly show what refunds are given.

JM said that at the moment it is not possible to have a statement with one-liners that show the refunds, however, she will be comparing the old statements with the new ones to see the difference and will also look at the online system for ordering statements and see why it is producing statements for such a long backdated time frame.

JM informed all the leaseholders that she is attending the meetings in order to consult and get feedback with Leaseholders. She said there would be a new IT system and it would hopefully be producing the statements in the format requested by Leaseholders.

Several leaseholders were concerned with the cost implications the new IT system would have on Leaseholders and whether any of the cost would be charged back to them. JM to get back to NELA about the cost implications. (JM)

e) **Audit Report**

MG stated that although there have been some improvements in Leasehold Services much more could be done to improve the services provided. She raised the following questions about the report;

- i. MG asked about a point in the report that read 'Leasehold staff attend TRAs every three months and directly contact 15 leaseholders each month to discuss their concerns'.

LT informed all that at Stamford Hill, the Leasehold Officer does not attend TRAs but maybe other Leasehold Officers from other neighbourhood offices do attend. However she advised that Catherine Marie will be contacting random leaseholders over the coming months to carry out occupancy checks.

- ii. 'Hackney Homes is effective at resolving most disputes with leaseholders. No leaseholder has yet used the independent dispute resolution service provided by the ALMO'. Several leaseholders said they did not know about the dispute resolution service.

JM said that it had been publicised, and an article would be included in the next newsletter plus in the booklet that is sent with the invoices.

LT reminded all that it had recently been included in the January issue of the NELA newsletter.

JM said that Hackney Homes has its own complaints procedure. And if leaseholders were not happy with it they could go to the LVT. The halfway point is the Dispute Resolution Service whose price is cheaper than that of the LVT. Leaseholders asked how independent it was, and JM explained that it is conducted by a Leasehold Specialist, a member of the complaints team and one other member and that it is totally independent of Hackney homes.

JM said that the Audit commission report on leasehold services was good; however Hackney Homes are always striving for ways to increase the levels of satisfaction with leaseholders.

In response to the following question:-

- iii. ' Hackney Homes leaseholders received the highest service charge bills in London in 2006/07' MG said that the benchmark had always said that the service charge was good, but how can it be so high and still be value for money?

JM said that it was not all about over billing and that the prices are dependant on each borough and the various services that are provided by each borough. The 2006/07 charges were high, but this was because of there were items that Hackney was not charging for before and are now charging for and hence the increase in the bills.

f) A Leaseholder enquired about entry doors that had been installed and leaseholders had been charged £2,500 per household.

JM said that the amount spent is normally divided by the bed factor, and that leaseholders do not pay or subsidise payments for tenants.

JM said that she cannot answer specific questions for specific properties and asked the leaseholder who had the query to give her the details at the end of the meeting and

she will get back to them. She will provide to them an itemised breakdown of the costs for the entry doors.

g) Garages

Several leaseholders enquired about the fact that there were various garages that are empty and this could be the fact that rental charges keep rising over the years hence making fewer people interested in renting them out. They said that if the price could be reduced, than maybe more people would rent them out.

h) Several leaseholders queried about the cost of water penetration and having to pay an excess on their insurance.

JM informed all that if they experienced a leak, the leaseholder would have to claim on their own insurance and then their insurance would claim from Hackney council. If they were charged an excess, they could seek compensation from the Council.

If the tenant does not have insurance, the leaseholder would have to claim off the council insurance, but it has to be proven that it was negligence on the council's behalf.

LT suggested that it would be a good idea to invite someone from the Insurance department to one of the NELA meetings and asked if residents would be interested with this. Majority of attendees were very much in favour. (VC)

i) A leaseholder enquired about if they required a plumber in an emergency; could they call the call centre and get a plumber sent out?

JM reminded all leaseholders that they are responsible for their own repairs, even in times of emergencies. Hackney Homes has no responsibility to send out a plumber.

JM reiterated that there would be legal implications if the repairs centre recommended a plumber to a leaseholder, as well as there being a conflict of interest if Hackney Homes plumbers or electricians were to work privately for leaseholders.

JM also said that if the leak was emanating from the Leasehold property, and they did not get the work done, Hackney Homes would be forced to get an injunction and do the work and recharge the leaseholder.

j) A leaseholder queried that she had problems with her neighbour (a tenant) not reporting defects to the repairs call centre which caused further problems to the property. She said that the tenant is neglecting and not taking responsibility for the home (a street property).

JM said that we cannot compel people to change their attitudes or behaviours. LT said that the tenant or the leaseholder should contact the Estate manager who would look into the problem. She also suggested that the newsletters sent out by Estate managers includes residents' responsibilities about looking after their properties.

MG said under her Panel chairmanship hat, that Street properties would be a topic of discussion with LT when they next meet.

- k) MG suggested that a one stop shop should be started, whereby enquires should be sent to the Leasehold Officer who will in turn get in touch with the various departments, instead of going directly through Leasehold and Income Services.

LT said that the leaseholders should contact Catherine Marie on 020 8356 6359 in the first instance with queries. Cm will be holding a surgery at the NHO once a week, the dates and times will be advertised.

7) DATE OF NEXT MEETING

VC advised that the next meeting will be on 9th June 2009 and that Charlotte Graves has been invited to attend.

VC closed the meeting at 20.45hrs.