



Minutes of the General Meeting held on Tuesday 9th June 2009
Joseph Court Community Hall at 7 P.M.

Present

Vi Carpenter (VC)- **Chair**

Committee Members

Muriel Gordon (MG)
Ted Johnson (TG)
Irene Lewington (IL)
Shirley Bogan
Sheila Coxon
Ann Courington

Members

N. Clarke
M. Mekonnen
S. Shen
Mr & Mrs H D Lucas
W. Carpenter
Mr & Mrs Salem
E. Conway
E. Charles
Mrs Brett
Mrs Robinson
V. Mensah
M. O'Toole
Mr & Mrs Dorsett
E. Hundeyin
J. Sheldon
C. King
A. Koc
M. Elmrabet

There were some residents who did not sign the attendance sheet.

In attendance

Charlotte Graves – Chief Executive, Hackney Homes
Judith Morrison – Head of Leasehold and Right to Buy Services
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.

VC welcomed Charlotte Graves, Chief Executive (Hackney Homes), Judith Morrison, Head of Leasehold and Right to buy Services, (Hackney Homes), John Maloney (Energy Manager) and Catherine Marie (Leasehold Officer) to the meeting. VC also congratulated Judith Morrison on being appointed Head of Leasehold and Right to Buy services.

2) **PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The previous minutes of 10 February 2009 were proposed by Muriel Gordon and seconded by Ted Johnson and accepted as a true reflection of matters discussed at the last general meeting.

3) **MATTERS ARISING**

- **Update on meeting with Diane Abbott MP**

VC circulated a letter she had received from Diane Abbott regarding the proposal they have in place for payment options that can be made available for leaseholders. However she has not received any other correspondence or update from Diane Abbott.

- **Plain English Leases**

VC requested that a layman's version of the lease to be placed on the website for all leaseholders to access and they should not be any charge as Leaseholders already pay for administration charges with their service charges.

JM informed the meeting that handbooks are provided to all leaseholders which have explanations of various sections of the leases. She also said that it would not be possible to have the Lease in plain English as it is a legal document and hence the language in which it is written. JM also said that work is being done on the new leases that are to be provided to new leaseholders, but that they will not be in plain English. She also said that this lease can then be put on the website for leaseholders to view and refer to. Those leaseholders who do not have access to the internet, can send their name and address to the L & RTB team who will send them a copy of the lease.

- **Job ticket Procedure**

MG informed all of the pilot procedure which had been introduced by Hackney Homes but did not work out. However, Property services were able to provide her with a one-off report of all repairs that have been done to various blocks. This was passed on to the other NELA members to go through and make their comments on.

VC identified three issues amongst many and felt that there should be an independent auditor who should investigate all job tickets as a way of ensuring that leaseholders could have faith in the information they receive from Hackney Homes. Some of the issues were Ashdale House, Nicholl House and Needwood House being charged £931.18, £634.56 and £73.12 respectively for Master fob keys as requested by the regeneration team. She feels that the cost of master fobs should not be charged to the leaseholders and that the differences in costs were astronomic.

MG said that she had sent her queries (approximately 41) to Bob Phillips via Catherine but had yet to receive a response and it was painfully obvious that if Hackney Homes were not providing information internally there was little hope for residents to obtain responses.

JM informed the meeting that the report is normally scrutinised before any charges are made to leaseholders. She also reminded leaseholders that they need to raise the questions beforehand with her department as she is unable to answer questions regarding specific properties at the meeting without background information.

MG advised that she was under the impression that the report had been scrutinised and the point being made was that the information has been passed to Hackney Homes for response but so far nothing has materialised.

JM also informed the meeting that the accounts are normally audited once a year before the actuals for the year are sent out to leaseholders. VC advised that they were looking for a more independent audit.

VC said she had emailed Bob Phillips and Humara on the 13th May to highlight the chargeable repairs, but she is yet to get a response from them.

JM to chase up on the emails and responses.

A resident said that he had had problems with emails not being replied to within the 10 working days. CG explained that there is a policy on replying to any correspondence within 10 working days and apologised for the lack of response, **JM to give feedback on the lack of replies.**

MG expressed the view that she had felt that she was being paranoid about lack of responses when raised in other forums, but listening to residents concerns at this meeting, she took it that as confirmation that it was not paranoia and action had to be taken to address this communication issue.

A resident explained that she had visited the NHO and was denied a parking permit as she had arrears on her service Charge account. JM explained that if there is a disputed sum but no payments are being paid for the remainder amount, then a parking permit will not be issued.

JM reminded all present that the forum is for general points for all leaseholders and not to deal with specific individual cases.

Another resident expressed gratitude for the existence of NELA, who were working hard on behalf of leaseholders. MG advised that without the support of Pinnacle who recognised that leaseholders needed a voice, NELA would not exist. She felt that Hackney Homes had missed a tailor made opportunity. They have leasehold officers in each neighbourhood and they should be able to lead local forums similar to NELA. Leaseholders should not be expected to pay for having a dialogue. The Borough wide Forum was not represented with just a few hundred members and in any case NELA's prime objective was to have a continuous dialogue to resolve issues rather than take the legal route.

- **Statement Format**

Shirley Bogan explained that she requested for a statement of her accounts from the L & RTB team and was provided with one for the last 18 years from the day she bought her property. She feels that this is a waste of resources. She would rather receive a statement for the last year.

JM explained that she will inform her team to ask the client for the time period for which they want the statement before it is sent out to them.

- **Insurance Issues**

VC informed all that they will be inviting a member of the insurance department to the next meeting in October. **CM to send invite.**

- **Street Properties**

MG informed all that there will be a drop in session organised by the Resident Participation Team specifically for leaseholders and tenants who live in street properties to be held on 17th June 2009 at the Lea View House Community Hall, London, E5 9EA. The session will provide Street Property residents with advice and information on repair issues, Decent Homes works and ways of getting involved in an informal, local setting on a one-to-one basis. It will also afford residents the opportunity to meet Hackney Homes Officers.

4) METER READINGS AND RECHARGE OF ELECTRICITY COSTS

MG has made enquires for over 2 years on what meters fed what in her block, as there appeared to be duplication of charges and charges which should not be made. The information provided showed that to be the case.

John Maloney, Head of Energy explained that they had a partial audit 3 years ago of the meters, and out of 3500 meters, 2500 were audited.

He explained that the problems his department faces is that as the meters consume a relatively small amount of electricity, the cost of coming to read them is high. The energy company will only come out to read the meters every 2 years. However, for larger meters, they are looking at having automated meters that will mean they do not have to physically go out and read the metres.

He also suggested that maybe the Caretakers or cleaners would read the meters on their behalf. MG pointed out that it is not the caretakers/cleaners or Estate Managers responsibility to do so and it is within energy management to send some one to read their meters. She was also not happy with a partial audit being undertaken.

CG recognised that leaseholders would require actual costs and HH was not a profit organisation. JM advised that this would need further discussion as it was a major issue.

John to confirm whether the North East was included in the audit that took place.

Ms Courington asked whether his department is responsible for ordering what type of equipment should be installed in communal areas, i.e. LED lighting.

JM informed her that the communal lighting would come under a program of works, and that she would need to check on the website if there are any programs for her area and then she can give her suggestions.

5) GENERAL QUESTION TIME WITH CHARLOTTE GRAVES AND JUDITH MORRISON.

Charlotte Graves introduced herself to NELA and mentioned that Hackney Homes are responsible for 28,000 homes, a third of which are leasehold properties. She reiterated that Hackney Homes are not a profit making organisation.

CG mentioned that the problems that do come about with leaseholders are partially due to the fact that as they were sold as RTB, the council process was not geared to

take into account the leaseholders. The Landlords and Tenants Act was more geared towards that private sector and not the council leaseholders.

CG said that they are changing the attitude of staff to deal more effectively with leaseholders, offering them more training in order to answer leaseholder's queries more efficiently. She also apologised for the lack of responses to emails sent to officers.

CG introduced the idea of a **Leasehold Advisory Group**, which she would chair and will be borough wide. Information on the group was sent out to all leaseholders/freeholders borough wide in the last newsletter, inviting leaseholders to nominate themselves.

The aims of the group will be;

- For a group of leaseholders who represent all neighbourhoods to meet with CG giving her ideas on how to implement improvements.
- Regular dialogue with CG on realistic ways to solve problems.

The Group will comprise not more than 30 people spread across the borough, a representative from all the different panels as well as the borough wide forum, but not anybody who already sits on other panels/groups.

Cllr Middleton said that this is not a independent group that is separate from Hackney Homes, CG reiterated that the meeting is a chance for leaseholders to air their views with her.

Questions to CG/JM

- Sheila Coxon said that the major works bills she received for security doors was overcharged by £622.04. if she didn't know of the charge of another block, she wouldn't have known of the overcharge.

JM said that individual matters could not be discussed at the meeting without having the background information. **JM to take the details and feed back to Ms Coxon.**

- Veronica Mensah said that that during the consultation period for the installation of the security doors, she felt that her objections were not taken into account, she sent letters to the L & RTB team but they informed her to contact the NHO.

JM mentioned that when the Section 20's are sent out to leaseholders, they give reasons for why the works are being carried out.

- John Sheldon enquired on how quickly he is meant to receive a breakdown of his service charges when he requests for one.

JM said that the Actual bills are sent out in September and the breakdown would then be available then.

- MG said that when they had their windows and roof installed, they were advised that the Repairs Call Centre would hold all guarantees. However, when she tested the system, she was informed that they did not have any record of any

guarantee for the windows/roof, hence that would then incur a recharge to the leaseholders.

- She also asked about the service standards and timescales for resolution of problems. MG also enquired about the Dispute Resolution Service and who sits on it and how many case they have had. **JM to feedback.**

CG said that the service standards are for correspondence to be replied to within 10 working days, however there are cases that require investigation and hence would take longer to respond to, but a holding response should however be sent explaining this.

- IL questioned the fact that when new windows were being installed in her property, she already had an extractor fan installed and she wanted them to replace it. However she was told that they are optional, and if they wanted them installed, they would have to get their own electrician to do the wiring within her property.

JM said that the extractor fans are optional, and when the Section 20's are sent out, leaseholders are asked whether or not they want them installed. They do need to get an electrician to do the works within their property as all works within their property are the responsibility of the leaseholder and Hackney Homes cannot do the internal works for them.

- Steven Shen mentioned that when he bought his property in 2006 within the Woodberry down area, he bought it on the understanding that the works will be started in 2009, however, he has been told that the works will start in 2013. They are in a dilemma now as they cannot sell their properties. What kind of compensation could they be given due to the change of plans?

JM said that when a property is being sold, the solicitors ask L & RTB questions about the planned works for that area. They then reply with the information they have at hand at that time about the works planed for that area.

6) ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business

7) DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 20th October 2009, and will include the AGM.