

30th November 2015

Mr Keith Jenkins
Chair of the Board
Homes for Haringey
48 Station Rd
London N22 2TY

Dear Mr Jenkins,

Thank you for your recent letter in connection with future plans for leaseholder engagement and matters which are of importance to leaseholders. We would like to take this opportunity to tell you something of what we believe are important matters for leaseholders and then to express our views on possible future formats for leaseholder involvement.

What matters to leaseholders.

Transparency – for example information provided under what has become known as Florrie's law. Ultimately, if leaseholders ask Homes for Haringey for information about grants that they have received and to what properties they relate, HfH should be able to provide answers.

Costs – HfH should be able to provide evidence that they are providing value for money for expenditure incurred – which includes the fact that costs are properly managed and controlled. HfH should provide a more detailed breakdown of costs in the Section 20 and invoice.

HfH could consider carrying out trials for smaller blocks to manage their own properties under the tenants management provisions.

Quality of work – Evidence of work done needs to be retained by HfH. This may best be provided by 'before' and 'after' photographs. HfH need better monitoring of jobs – especially now that staff have the equipment to provide the evidence. There needs to be better monitoring of subcontractors to ensure that works are properly carried out and completed before paying their bills and re-charging leaseholders. Leaseholders may not be billed until some time later. If it is only at this time that problems with works are raised, there may be issues with warranties having little time left to run before issues are addressed.

This also can cause issues with **re-charge billing**. There are too many instances of errors in charges to leaseholders. Duplication of charges is still a major issue. There are wrong use of job codes, meaning re-charges are incorrect. Jobs are charged for without having been completed. These issues are mostly to do with repairs.

It seems that **most leaseholders** have experienced problems with these issues. This is also costing HfH money.

Good Design and Practicality- aesthetics are as important as functionality. There is an example where a payment of approximately £1,500 per leaseholder for a new front door/fob entry was made. It looks safe and secure but all the burglars have to do is press the trades button and they can walk straight in. A perfectly nice and ordinary (less prison-like) looking door and key entry system as well as being considerably cheaper, would have done better. Another example, floor coverings

which look dirty quickly. Dingy entrances. Little consideration is given to design and aesthetics, we are talking about people's homes.

Honest and timely responses - Responses to leaseholder queries are not always full or correct and sometimes are confusing. Also, too often leaseholders have to chase and chase for responses.

Management charges on Major works- on Decent Homes bills, there is a percentage to Asset Management and a further percentage to Home Ownership Team. There appears to be little incentive to drive costs down. It is not certain as to how this benchmarks in comparison to other LAs.

Management charges on repairs – These are currently running at just under 40% of the actual job cost and added to bills. It is hard to see how this level of add-ons can be justified.

Trust and confidence – Many leaseholders have a very poor opinion of HfH – often as a result of the matters raised above. HfH need to respond better to build that trust.

Leaseholder engagement on major works – It would be very useful if HfH could get the surveyors involved with consultations at an early stage. HfH need to provide leaseholders with more information at an early stage – especially at the point when in-depth surveys are being done. At the moment it is only after these surveys are done and S.20 notices are sent out that leaseholders have any real idea of the works that are proposed to be carried out. Furthermore, the S.20 notices often bear little resemblance to the final bills. There is too much 'guesstimate'. It seems that few leaseholders have ever seen an in depth survey, and when the time comes, some have been told that only sight surveys called 'visual assessments' are being carried out by the contractors ie that in depth surveys are not being done. As leaseholders have to pay significant amounts towards the costs, this is an area that really needs to be improved. Furthermore, early leaseholder involvement can often prevent problems arising later.

Communications - HfH is continuing to get things wrong e.g. for non-resident leaseholders continuing to have letters sent to the property address even though HfH have been given the correspondence address.

Staffing and competence - Given that HfH have been awarded the contract for managing the LBH housing issues, does it have enough staff with the experience, knowledge, and competence to properly manage the contract? It would appear that there are difficulties, given the cuts in funding that are being imposed.

Lease Extensions-- Some of us have recently received marketing information for a new letting agency run by HfH. HfH could also send us marketing information about extending our leases. Some leaseholders may want to take this up thereby creating an income for HfH and the Council. Some might not realise leases can be extended for a reasonable amount, calculated with a statutory formula and before the lease falls below 80 years. The majority of leases in the borough were issued in 1985-1992 for 125 years. Some of our leases are approaching 90 years. These can be extended for a reasonable amount now, before the much more expensive option of extending leases below 80 years kicks in. We are also of the opinion that if the HfH fee is fixed and reasonable, there would be positive take up and engagement.

Is there a difference between leaseholders who live in their flat and those who rent them out?

There is a difference. Non-resident leaseholders are subject to additional obligations, which seem to be increasing. Non-resident leaseholders comprise a sizeable proportion of leaseholders and are a growing population. They are, however, barred from being elected as a leasehold member of the Board of Directors. There should be two leasehold Member places on the Board, one of which may be held by a non-resident leaseholder.

Leaseholder representation on the Board of Directors

The current leaseholder member of the Board appears to be very anonymous in terms of reporting back to leaseholders who elected her. Notwithstanding that the role requires the incumbent member to act properly and purely in the interest of HfH, there should be some attendance at panel meetings – even if only at the leasehold panel and that attendance should be made public, so that matters for the Board's attention can be raised.

Is there a reason to have a forum for all leaseholders?

There is a role for a forum for all leaseholders. It could provide an excellent platform for topical issues, perhaps held on a quarterly basis, and would probably be very popular with leaseholders. However, it should not be at the expense of the panels system currently running.

The various panels specialize in different aspects. They are also attended by front line officers who have the experience to research and provide answers to matters that arise. HfH could do more to publicise the existence of these panels, and encourage residents (leaseholders and tenants) to attend. The electronic meetings calendar on the HfH website is sadly little updated.

Any forum could also run alongside any leaseholder groups (which may have a particular area of interest – e.g. one estate). Leaseholder groups provide support for other leaseholders and have often built up a lot of knowledge, which they can share.

It is unlikely that a single forum can offer that degree of knowledge. It is also unlikely to meet a core criteria of resident engagement.

Various groups of leaseholders and resident associations exist. No single group can realistically represent all leaseholders.

It would be useful if HfH could support leaseholder and resident groups by, for example, from time to time giving out the names and contact details of those groups.

Residents of different sorts of buildings do have particular interests. However, they also have many common issues – of the types listed above. Setting up different meetings for different types of leaseholder would be wasteful of officers' time and would not be cost effective. There would be common attendance at various meetings and attendance by residents could be depleted, leading to a call to dispense with them.

HLCG and its individual members would like to be involved in the direct dialogue with the Board on leasehold issues.

We look forward to hearing from you,

Kind regards

Haringey Leaseholders' Campaign Group (HLCG)

