

Leaseholder Action Group (LAG) 'Working for Council Leaseholders across the city'

Minutes of LAG Committee Meeting

Monday 8 September 2014, 6.00pm to 8:00pm
Hampshire Lodge

1. Present: Linda Shaw, Tony Worsfold, Muriel Briault & Dee Howland

Officers: Dave Arthur (BHCC), Simon Pickles (BHCC), Hilary Edgar (BHCC) and Becky Purnell (BHCC)

2. Apologies: Were offered from Keely McDonald and Becca Mann

Introductions were given and the chair opened the meeting.

3. Update on Resident Involvement –How do leaseholders fit into the new arrangements? (Hilary Edgar & Becky Purnell)

3.1 HE –gave an overview on the changes to Area Panels that take affect from September 2014. She has written a paper on Changes to Area Panels (copies were circulated) that went to the last round of Area Panels.

The Area Panels now follow ward boundaries and as a result some of the Tenant Associations are now members of different Area Panels. The biggest change being to the East Area Panel which now has 7 Tenant Associations. Central has 20 Tenant Associations, North 16 Tenant Associations and West 13 Tenant Associations.

3.2 HE – the changes will have an effect on the membership of the Service Improvement Groups (SIGs) as representatives elected from Area Panel to these groups may now be in a different area to the one they were elected originally to represent. They will stay as members of the group as they were elected to serve for two years. We will try to fill vacancies on the SIG's through elections at September's Area Panel's.

3.3 HE- the Area Panels are currently chaired by a councillor from the Wards, they held an internal election. After the local elections they will be chaired by a member of the Housing Committee.

3.4 HE – the changes also affects the Estates Development Budget, and at the start of the next financial year 2015-16 each of the four areas budgets will be re-calculated based on the number of homes in the areas.

Leaseholder Action Group (LAG)

'Working for Council Leaseholders across the city'

3.5 HE –we are setting up a task and finish group to meet 3 or 4 times to look at ways to strengthen Area Panels and would like a representative from each of the four city wide groups together with one member from each of the Area Panels to join the two members (Chris El-Shabba & Ann Ewings) already selected from the Involvement & Empowerment SIG to make up the group.

Agreed: After a discussion it was decided Tony Worsfold would be LAG's representative on the group and that Linda Shaw the deputy and attend if he was unavailable.

The group will be looking at whether the city wide groups should have representation at the Area Panels. The Tenant Disability Network is elected from the Area Panels and high rise and sheltered are present through associations; but leaseholders could be under-represented.

3.6 TW –asked if HE's paper was going to any other groups for discussion. HE –no but, the recommendations from the group may go to Housing Committee for consideration.

3.7 TW – does LAG need representation on all four area panels?

HE –this is an issue for LAG.

LS –having a representative on all four panels would make it easier to report back to LAG.

DA – these are issues for the working group. Maybe LAG should consider changing their Terms of Reference.

3.8 BP –the Task and Finish group will be considering the merits of having one city wide Area Panel looking at policies with the others being local Area Panels.

TW – a city wide Area Panel could almost be another City Assembly.

3.9 TW – thought it would be easier if the city wide group's constitutions were the same as Tenant Associations.

BP – The city wide groups are tenant led and it is for them to agree their constitution.

3.10 TW- has there been any feedback from the other city wide groups.

Leaseholder Action Group (LAG)

'Working for Council Leaseholders across the city'

HE – not yet but, it is an agenda item for Wednesday's Sheltered Housing Action Group meeting.

3.11 BP –on 18 November (to be confirmed) there will be free social media training available (for Facebook & Twitter) at Jubilee Library if anyone was interested.

LS will attend for LAG.

Action: BP will email LS details for the training.

3.12 BP- does LAG want voting rights at Area Panel.

Agreed: The group agreed that they did.

3.13 BP – Tenant Only or Resident Only meetings are facilitated by the Resource Centre. Each Area Panel has its own TO or RO meeting where residents raise items for the blue pages for officers to respond to; however it is always quicker to make a complaint or enquiry rather than wait for a meeting..

3.14 BP –the minutes from the last LAG meeting ask that a copy of the Resident Involvement Officer's job description be made available. She then went through their roles as set out in the job description.

LS –this was asked for so we know which issues they can help us with.

Action: A copy of the RIO job description will go out with the minutes.

3.15 HE –asked how often LAG met?

LS –six times a year.

4. Consultation on the new Asset Management Strategy -Simon Pickles (Housing Stock Review Manager).

4.1 SP –provided those present with a hand out that gave an outline of the major issues for leaseholders from the 75 page report that went to Housing Leadership on the proposed new Asset Management Strategy. The aim of the strategy is to make the best use of the housing stock and identify opportunities for new builds on HRA land.

Leaseholder Action Group (LAG)

'Working for Council Leaseholders across the city'

4.2 SP – there are three key objectives and these are:

- Make best use of housing assets –properties, residents and staff
- Step up engagement –to gain a shared understanding of what is important to residents and encourage people to get involved
- Raise the standard of both external and internal communal areas – by making them tenure neutral

The Property and Investment Team is determined to be outward looking and it is now time for the council to decide what they want their estates to look like in future. Ultimately, in the next 20 years, we would like them to be 'tenure neutral' so it is difficult to differentiate between council and private sector estates.

The new structure of the strategy is broken down into 4 sections: Buildings, Places, Land and People.

Buildings

4.3 SP – there are 3 leasehold related strategic principles for buildings those being:

- Investment will be guided by the results of the stock review survey (10 to 15% of the stock), unless there are good local and business management reasons for investing in other properties
- Future programmes to be transparent –delivering efficiencies for client and contractor
- Continue the cost effective strategy of targeting medium and high rise blocks for refurbishment and thermal efficiency upgrades.

If scaffolding has been erected we will look to carry out as many scheduled works as possible at the same time to affect a cost saving.

4.4 DH –asked if this was in operation at present as the railings at Chates Farm Court were not painted when the scaffolding was up.

SP- were you given a timescale for the painting of the railings?

DH –no.

LS –forward planning has always been contentious.

Leaseholder Action Group (LAG)

'Working for Council Leaseholders across the city'

4.5 TW –mentioned he lived in Warwick Mount and had received a planning application.

DA – a planning application is needed for buildings being cladded (change of appearance). Mears architect arranges planning consent before the council consult leaseholders.

Places

4.6 SP- again there are 3 leasehold related strategic principles for places. They are:

- Raise the standard for external and internal communal areas –making them tenure neutral
- Design in community safety and design out crime and ASB
- Adopt a maintenance free component replacement policy –use UPVC where and whenever possible to prevent the need for painting

4.7 SP –planned actions are to be put in place to help achieve the strategic principles. Cyclical redecoration, lighting and flooring programmes for blocks will be introduced. Major works -community and corporate colleagues will be consulted on hard and soft landscaping and opportunities to improve bike storage.

4.8 LS – cyclical maintenance programmes used to be carried out every 7 years. The reality is that they are not being done and there are some internal communal decoration works that have not been done for 40 years.

SP – Mears are now doing the cyclical redecoration programme but it won't be every 7 years. We are now looking at every 10 years.

DA – external works normally need doing more often than internal works.

Land

4.9 SP – 4 leasehold related strategic principles have been identified for land:

- The potential to create accommodation within existing buildings –e.g. proposals to convert the unused communal kitchen at St. James House into 3 flats, and elsewhere we are considering converting bin stores to flats

Leaseholder Action Group (LAG)

'Working for Council Leaseholders across the city'

SP- this could have a positive impact for leaseholders –additional tenants in a block could mean lower service charges.

LS – having bins outside will make estates untidy.

SP –we will ensure there is proper containment. The aim is to convert 5 bin rooms a year.

- Create accommodation within an expended envelope –by building outward and upward –building 3 or 4 extra floors on medium rise blocks
- Rank estates for regeneration based on; asset data, deprivation statistics, development potential and neighbouring regeneration projects
- Consider disposal of land and buildings –if it is in the council's best interest as the asset has become a financial liability

There are planned actions –we will propose to members the disposal of the freehold of blocks where we have no tenants as we still have management and maintenance liabilities but, only cover our costs. A review is planned of the current policy of selling loft spaces to top floor leaseholders.

4.12 MB – what will happen to the new Asset Management Strategy if there is a change in administration after next year's council elections?

SP –said it would depend on the new administration and what their policies and priorities were'.

4.13 SP – mentioned developers had asked to buy the land between Warwick Mount and The Stag but we are advising against it. We are looking to buy general fund sites to develop and the NHS has sites we may be able to buy to develop.

4.14 SP – we will only dispose of HRA buildings in exceptional circumstances.

People

4.15 SP – we will put people at the centre of Asset Management by improving our feedback data gathered from residents, giving us a better understanding of the long-term needs of tenants and leaseholders in different property types and geographic areas.

4.16 SP –there are two leasehold related strategic principles for people:

- To justify maintenance costs to leaseholders

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Leaseholder Action Group (LAG)

'Working for Council Leaseholders across the city'

- Ensure Property and Investment team has necessary skills to reduce the need to use external consultants and speed progress.

4.17 SP- planned actions for the above strategic principles include:

- Supplying technical and financial advice to leaseholders to help facilitate the efficient collection of charges
- Use leaseholder feedback to amend specifications or methods of operation on site
- Support leaseholders concerns when proposing environmental improvements
- Use urban designers and landscaping specialists on major works projects –giving them a less municipal feel

4.18 TW – asked when it was hoped the new Asset Management Strategy would be approved?

SP – housing committee will not approve unless we have consulted widely. It will need to go to the Housing Leadership team again and then housing committee for approval, but hopefully by March 2015.

5. Minutes from the AGM and matters arising.

Page 1 Point 4.5 DA – has checked and the LAG minutes are on the council's leaseholder web page. He made changes as some of the information was out of date. He also proposed that the committee may wish to look, at the next meeting, at what was actually up on the website, and propose any changes of amendments they might want to see.

LS agreed.

Page 2 Point 5.6 LS – there are some outstanding issues following meeting with Eve Hitchens over the role of Neighbourhood Officers and their participation with estate inspections.

DA –if you have specific questions we can get you the answer.

LS –could we ask Robert Keelan for a copy of the Neighbourhood Officers job description and could he let us know who is responsible for ensuring the actions identified on estate inspections get done.

DA – Yes. However, we have a one stop shop now. So if there are actual issues like cleaning not being done, for instance, or disrepair, if you call Housing Customer Services they will take up the case and forward it to

Leaseholder Action Group (LAG)

'Working for Council Leaseholders across the city'

whoever is responsible for dealing with it. In that way, leaseholders shouldn't have to be bothered with having to track down the team that actually does it.

BP –dates of estate inspections can be found on the council website.

Page 4 Point 4.8 DA –it is LAG's web page so you can post what you like on it.

Page 5 Point 5.7 LS – one of the leaseholders at Sylvan Hall received a letter from the council regarding her not replacing her front door with a fire safety door and I have spoken to a solicitor on her behalf.

DA – the fire safety door replacement programme has been ongoing for a number of years. Leaseholders were given 12 months to get their doors replaced otherwise legal enforcement action is taken. She will have received the letter being one of the next batch of leaseholders identified who have not complied.

LS –can payment be staggered for people on a low income?

DA – No, because the council aren't providing the service. The council have arranged for Mears to provide quotes but, leaseholders can get them fitted cheaper if they can. It is entirely the leaseholders responsibility. In Hove, you will need to apply to the council for consent if you wish to fit your own door. This can be done by contacting the Leasehold Team.

Minutes – Agreed as a true record

6. Update on providing information or repairs costs billed in the Certificates of Expenditure -DA

DA - thanked the committee for its input and good ideas at the previous meeting. He has worked up some examples of what a Certificate would look like with a note to say that further information about repairs, if desired, were available on request from the Leasehold Team. Also a revised breakdown of repairs, ordered by completion date and also with a note to say that original job summaries on which payment is demanded from BHCC for any individual jobs were also available on request.

The Committee expressed satisfaction that progress had been made on this issue.

7. Reports and Feedback from LAG representatives on committees or consultative groups

Leaseholder Action Group (LAG)

'Working for Council Leaseholders across the city'

7.1 DH – has been to two Tenancy SIG meetings. At the first meeting there was a speaker who spoke about ASB. His main message was to keep reporting ASB, get crime numbers and don't give up.

At the last meeting we began a project to look at making improvements in other areas and paid a visit to Buckley Close in Mile Oak.

8. Any Other Business

8.1 MB –the next City Assembly is on 15 November from 9.30am until 3.30pm and will be held at Clarendon Villas in Hove. It will cost £400 to hire but, this includes a PA system and they will set the rooms up for us.

BP- the venue was a school but is now a church.

9. Next Meeting.

9.1 3 November 2014, 6pm -8pm at Hampshire Lodge

