

Leaseholders Forum

Minutes of meeting held on:
Tuesday 22 April

Leaseholders Present: Mrs J Lapieza
Mrs G Dadson
Ms A Comfort
Mrs & Mrs G Smith
Mr B Gesling
Mr R Shitu
Ms S Lawson
Mrs A Trigg
Ms M Ewers
Mrs P Robinson
Ms F Tou

DBC Officers: Peter Dosad, Head of Housing Services
Alison Haines, Finance & Leasehold Manager
Wendy Mason, Resident Involvement Officer

Welcome

Peter Dosad opened the meeting and thanked everyone for giving up their time to attend.

Peter went on to explain that the Forum had been set up to give leaseholders an opportunity to get involved in topical reviews, consultations and discussions, e.g. council policy and procedure, service charges, invoicing, methods of payment, capital works programme and improvements.

Consultation

Repairs Service

The aim of this initial meeting is to open discussion on the proposal for extending the repairs service, currently only delivered to tenants, to leaseholders.

Those present were asked for views on:

- Is it a good idea?
- Do leaseholders want it?
- Would leaseholders use it?
- How would the scheme work?
- Who would be eligible?
- How much would it cost?

The general consensus was that the proposal was a good idea. Leaseholders appreciate that cheap is not necessarily the best.

Leaseholders said they were prepared to pay a little bit extra for a job done well. Peter Dosad was asked whether the quality of workmanship would be to an acceptable standard and if the rates were competitive.

Peter informed leaseholders that the council recently entered into a long-term partnership agreement with a maintenance company to carry out all repairs to tenanted properties. The partner was appointed following a robust tendering process, which process members of Dartford Borough Residents' Forum were involved in from beginning to end. Officers were

not involved in the final decision making process, which was made by Residents Forum Members and Councillors. The decision was based on the company's focus on customer service and quality of work.

Approx. 18,000 repairs are carried out every year and only a handful of complaints are received.

Leaseholders who opted to make use of this service would receive exactly the same level of service that is currently being provided to tenants.

It was agreed that officers should work on a proposed schedule of rates and a list of typical repairs that could be carried out. This will be presented at the next meeting.

Leasehold Handbook

The council has produced a draft leasehold handbook detailing the lease responsibilities of both leaseholders and the Council. Those present were asked if they would review the handbook, consider its contents and provide feedback to Alison Haines, Finance & Leasehold Manager. This will enable the handbook to be updated before the final version is issued. Leaseholders welcomed this. *WM to send handbook to all present.*

Leasehold Newsletter

The Leasehold Team are also considering the introduction of a quarterly leasehold newsletter to address specific leaseholder issues, and asked the meeting what they thought about the suggestion. This too was welcomed by those present.

General Questions

Comments were sought on the overall service received.

Service Charges

Those present felt that tenants do not always understand how repairs are recharged back, and that regardless of how rent is paid, all residents are responsible for contributing towards repairs. It was also felt that because of this lack of understanding, tenants do not respect communal areas.

In relation to paying for things that have been broken due to vandalism, the council does not recharge leaseholders for repairs that are reported as vandalism. Leaseholders should ensure that they call the leasehold services team to report such instances as soon as they happen.

A debate followed whether or not cleaners could clean effectively with cold water. Peter said that this was a continuous issue raised at meetings and confirmed that the contractor uses special cleaning agents which react to cold water and therefore cold water can be used. He accepted that the standard of the clean in each individual block may differ, but there are very few complaints that come in from the other 250+ blocks. Each complaint is dealt with on an individual basis.

Some leaseholders are confused about what they should be paying for, for example its possible that leaseholders in the same block could be charged for different things. *A breakdown of standard charges will be included in the newsletter.*

PD suggested a possible review of insurance and rates takes place.

Insurance

There was confusion over what should be claimed against which insurance i.e. contents or building. *Examples will be included in the newsletter.*

Buying the Freehold

It was asked whether leaseholders could buy out the freehold. Alison said that this is referred to as “Enfranchisement” and this topic is covered in the draft handbook. *More information on this will be included in the newsletter.*

Youths congregating in communal areas

Peter appreciated peoples comments about young people attracting their friends and “hanging around” in stairwells. However, he empathised with the young people because there is nothing else for them do. He said that if they were causing a nuisance and being anti-social then it should be reported and would be dealt with.

Date of Next Meeting

To be held at the end of the Summer – date to be advised.