STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL - Leaseholder Meeting

6 September 2017
6.30pm – Autun Room, Daneshill House

Present:  Stevenage Borough Council, Anita Mackie (AM) – Service Manager Leasehold & Lettings, Anne Hensley (AH) – Senior Leasehold Advisor, Rebekah Brydon (RB) – Major Works Officer, John Marshall (JM) Neighbourhood Warden, Councillor Phil Bibby (PB) Vice Chair of HMB

Chair: Diane Green (DG)
Minutes: Anne Hensley (AH)

Leaseholders: Salima Sharif, David Weemys, Alan Dean, Jean Sebastian, Robert Tregaskis, Brad Glenister, Lindsay Howie, June Pease, John Coyle, Joan O’Connor, Terry Grimwood, Jacqueline Bunce, Claire Garnett, Robert Smith, Lisa Kelvey, Paul Kyprianides, Carolyn Kyprianides, Lynsey Gammage, Donna Holton, Les Keen, Gabriel Joe

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<th>ITEM</th>
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<td>1. Welcome, introductions and apologies;</td>
<td>Apologies received from: Jon Thurlow and Ms C Prowle.</td>
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<td>2. Minutes of the last meeting</td>
<td>Minutes were agreed.</td>
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<td>3. Update from Neighbourhood Wardens</td>
<td>John Marshall gave out cards with wardens contact details and he advised the meeting that there were currently only 2 wardens but that they were actively recruiting for a third. The wardens are accredited by Herts Constabulary which means that wardens can issue fixed penalty notices for antisocial behaviour and fly tipping and other environmental issues. Fly tipping is a huge issue in Stevenage. In the last 4 weeks the wardens have issued 10 fixed penalty notices. There will be a press release to raise awareness of the wardens and their work. The money raised from the fixed penalty notices will be used to improve the community. Residents are welcome to join the wardens in their walkabouts, which last for approximately 1 hour.</td>
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You can report any problems on the free FixMyStreet website or online on fixmystreet.stevenage.gov.uk. Please add photographs to assist the wardens where possible.

Recently the wardens have dealt with an issue where drug takers were congregating around a log which had fallen down. The wardens had the remainder of the tree chopped down and the drug takers moved on. The wardens also had a fallen down fence fixed and a bin issue in Vardon Road resolved.

John advised that the wardens have a small amount of money that could be used for minor improvements in your area – let them know.

Q. What happens if a fixed penalty is issued to a person on benefits?
A. The wardens would expect payment of 50% within 14 days and the balance within 28 days; however in an attempt to help people who are experiencing difficulty the wardens have just agreed 3 x £60 payments. If payment is not received the person will be taken to court and named in the local newspapers.

Q. What happens if someone fly-tips then moves out of the block?
A. If the wardens know who is responsible they will be charged for the cost of removal of the fly-tipping but residents need to let the wardens know asap. Wardens are happy to get involved and check for the identity of the culprit.

There are posters ready to be put up in flat blocks showing neighbourhood warden contact details.

4. Update from HMB

Councillor Phil Bibby, vice-chair of the board gave the update.

HMB meets once a month to look at issues before they go to Executive.

Cllr Bibby listed some of the achievements of the board over the last 12 months which included:
- Comments to Executive on enhancing the repairs service (ongoing)
- Comments to Executive regarding Leaseholder payment options
- Various strategies and policies including:
  - Rent and service charge policy
  - Repairs policy
• Decant policy
• The board got involved in the Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC)
• The board discussed and commented on the Housing Business Plan
• The board commented and agreed the Repairs Handbook
• The board monitored poor performance on voids
• The board agreed the Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) reviews of Liberty Gas and the Customer Service Centre
• The board monitored CSP review improvement plans
• The board started to get involved in the Housing Transformation programme

Cllr Bibby then briefly discussed the recent HMB meeting which gave an update on Stevenage tower block fire safety. SBC had produced 2 leaflets which were hand delivered to everyone in the high rise blocks following Grenfell and SBC are carrying out fire safety visits to residents. Where a fire safety check has been carried out SBC are placing ‘fire safety plan’ signs on the back of the front door of the flat.

Cllr Bibby then advised that Camden is setting up a borough wide independent ‘Camden Fire Safety Advisory Panel’. The panel will address fire safety concerns, develop closer links with tenants and better communicate the latest fire safety advice. The panel will be made up of residents, Councillors, the Fire Brigade and Council officers. HMB were discussing whether this model would work in Stevenage.

Finally Cllr Bibby advised that SBC were currently doing a feasibility study on the use of sprinklers in SBC tower blocks.

**Q.** A leaseholder asked “does anybody have any concerns regarding fire safety in their block”?
**A.** SBC has weekly meetings to discuss any issues arising regarding fire safety.

**Q.** Do the council receive any revenue from the phone companies who have phone masts on SBC owned flat blocks?
**A.** Yes.

**Q.** The Harrow Court fire in 2005 happened because the flat where the fire started did not have an electricity supply at the time so the fire alarm was not working.
**A.** All flats have a battery back-up fire alarm.
**Q.** But what if the residents don’t replace the battery?
| Q. | Can SBC make all their tenancies non-smoking? | A. | No, SBC do not have the ability to do this. |
| Q. | Will fire safety be taken into account during the major refurbishment contract (MRC)? | A. | Yes |
| Q. | What has been discussed regarding fire safety for the MRC? | A. | This will be dealt with in the next agenda item. |

5. **Update on the Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC)**

For the benefit of new leaseholders at the meeting Rebekah Brydon (RB), major works officer, gave a brief explanation of the MRC. She explained that work was going on in the background and that SBC has reduced the number of prospective contractors down to 5, and that SBC were evaluating these 5. By mid to late October SBC should be able to offer the contract. SBC will be using two contractors who will split the works between them taking roughly half the town each. Once the contract has been procured SBC will be out on site deciding on what work will be done. SBC will advise leaseholders when we have this information and leaseholders will have a chance to discuss the works with SBC.

The Section 20 Stage 2 Notice should be sent by mid-March 2018 and contractors should be on site in July 2018.

<p>| Q. | When will the MRC start? | A. | SBC anticipate works will begin in July 2018. Once SBC have procured the contractors, we will be able to begin putting together a plan to identify which blocks will be scheduled for which year. This will be based on several factors including need and logistics. SBC will update leaseholders early next year when we have more information |
| Q. | Diane Green &amp; June Pease put their names forward to liaise over the MRC and asked if this opportunity was still available? | A. | Maureen Herdman is dealing with resident involvement and will be in touch shortly. |
| Q. | Can Leaseholders have a say in what works will be done? | A. | Works will be discussed and agreed during site visits. Residents will be invited to attend and SBC welcome all feedback and suggestions. SBC also need the chosen contractors to get involved as well which will mean them coming to meetings. |</p>
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<th>Q.</th>
<th>If there are outstanding block repairs which also get picked up in the MRC, will leaseholders end up paying twice?</th>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>No, any repairs SBC are already aware of will be carried out at the time the block is being refurbished. However, as the MRC is to be carried out over a five year period, it is possible that some temporary work may have to take place to protect the fabric of the building, whilst waiting for the more major works to start.</td>
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<th>Q.</th>
<th>Will the MRC be charged on leaseholders normal service charge account?</th>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>No, your service charge account is for the services you receive regularly which are detailed in your Lease. The MRC is block specific major planned works which do not happen on a regular basis. The cost of these works will be charged to a separate account specifically for major works. This account will have a unique payment reference number which will be shown on your invoice.</td>
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<th>Q.</th>
<th>If leaseholders are not happy with the work being done, who do we contact?</th>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>There will be several people who you will be able to discuss issues with at the time of the works and after completion. The contractors will have Resident Liaison Officers for each block. These Resident Liaison Officers will introduce themselves to you and be visible daily on site during the works. All operatives will also be able to pass over concerns and you will be given contact details for out-of-hours emergencies and for follow up snagging issues. You can also contact the Major Works Officer – Rebekah Brydon – at Stevenage Borough Council by telephoning 01438 242666 or emailing to <a href="mailto:rebekah.brydon@stevenage.gov.uk">rebekah.brydon@stevenage.gov.uk</a>.</td>
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<th>Q.</th>
<th>LK said that the cost of the works should be limited to £10K? (She was referring to Florrie’s Law)</th>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>Florrie’s Law relates to works where government funding is available. Unfortunately, there is no funding for the Major Refurbishment Contract so this law does not apply.</td>
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<th>Q.</th>
<th>Why can’t we get Government funding?</th>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>There is no Government funding available at present.</td>
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<th>Q.</th>
<th>LK suggested to the leaseholders that they can get their own surveyor to come out and check on the proposed works.</th>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>SBC is trying to work with leaseholders on this rather than against them. SBC are doing very thorough surveys of all of the flat blocks alongside the contractors and all documents related to those surveys can be read and reviewed in our council offices. SBC will give details...</td>
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of the exact time and place further into the process. However, should you wish to contract your own surveyor SBC will discuss with you any findings that you may have.

Q. A leaseholder mentioned that Shephall Way flats received bills of £26K and asked “are we likely to receive such large bills”?
A. Leaseholders in the Shephall Way flats were charged £15,384.33 only; this was to have the central staircase completely rebuilt. SBC are not in a position to discuss the invoices at this time as we have not surveyed the blocks and therefore do not know the exact works required in each block. SBC have put together a very comprehensive payment options policy which can be found on our website and we will discuss any payment issues on a one-to-one basis should this be required.

Q. Are we having a built-in clause if contractors go into liquidation?
A. If a contract was terminated, SBC would offer the remainder to the next highest scorer from the tendering process or we would have to re-tender if they were unavailable. Also, the second contractor would be offered the opportunity to extend their area which would work best if in later years. SBC would only pay for works completed and would not find ourselves in the position of being owed any money should this happen.

Q. If it’s decided that the roof needs replacing and lots of roofing work has already been carried out, unsuccessfully, to fix the roof leaks, would SBC continue to do more temporary roof repairs?
A. SBC and the contractor will consider each blocks importance to have work done as required. SBC are obligated to keep residents properties water tight and will assess each repair on its own merits.

Q. Why aren’t all blocks being done at the same time?
A. SBC have almost 550 blocks to work on. It is simply not possible to complete all of the works simultaneously.

Q. What financing model will SBC be using?
A. SBC pay the contractors on behalf of leaseholders and then re-charge you when the work is completed. A variety of payment methods will be available for residents to explore at the appropriate time, although leaseholders are free to make your own arrangements.

Q. Are you covering all areas in Stevenage?
A. Yes, all flat blocks are included except for the tower blocks as they are constructed differently and will require more specialist works.

Q. Leaseholders are concerned that tenants may want more
(expensive) works done as they don’t receive bills the same as leaseholders do. Will leaseholders have a choice, especially as they will have to pay?

**A.** If SBC think new floor covering is needed for instance, leaseholders might want to have lino as it’s cheaper. Also SBC need to keep blocks saleable. SBA will consider all resident feedback but we will carefully balance needs with wants. We are not planning to do anything that would be considered excessive but we will look at materials based on their durability, our ability to repair/replace in the coming years and potential savings on your service charges if repairs are much less frequent.

**Q.** If there are works which may need to be done in the near future, do leaseholders have the option to get them done at the same time as the MRC work?

**A.** SBC won’t do anything unnecessary but leaseholders’ opinions will be taken into account. We do not want to revisit the block in the near future to do works that could have been completed during the Major Refurbishment Contract as it will be more expensive. These are enveloping works to the whole of the building, inside and out and we want to cover as many areas as we can to save costs. Again, these concerns will be addressed during the site visits.

**Q.** Do leaseholders have to pay for tenants windows to be replaced?

**A.** No, leaseholders only pay for communal windows. Leaseholders will be given the option of having their windows done at the same time as this could be cheaper for them, especially if we have already erected scaffolding for the MRC work.

**Q.** If the cost of works required on a particular block is likely to be very high, what will SBC do? Will they sell the block or consider demolishing it?

**A.** SBC will take into consideration the costs of any works and will consider all options before going ahead with any that may seem uneconomical. We understand that leaseholders do not want to spend more on their properties than they are worth and we will listen to suggestions and discuss options should this situation arise. However, our hope is to be able to improve all of our blocks to the benefit of all residents.

**Q.** If leaseholders have already changed their windows, would they have to pay again to have them done as part of the MRC?

**A.** Leaseholders can have their windows changed during the MRC should they so wish and may find it is a cheaper option than having them done at a later stage. However, there is no obligation for any leaseholders to change their windows as a part of this contract and
any that have been done prior to this will remain as they are.

6. **Discussion about service charges**

Anita Mackie started by asking the meeting if they had all received their end-of-year statements. AM explained how the service charge year worked and advised that the 2 senior leasehold advisors would be starting to calculate the estimated charges for 2018/19 next week.

**Q. Why do leaseholders have to pay for burst pipes?**  
**A.** The council have to pay for any work carried out and recoup the money back. We have to recover our costs by recharging the tenants and leaseholders for the work.

**Q.** What happens if I disagree with a charge?  
**A.** The leasehold team will take your query to the department delivering the service and come back to you with their response.

**Q.** When are we going to receive the repairs listings for key leaseholders?  
**A.** These are being worked on now and will be available shortly.

**Q.** Do all leaseholders pay the same amount?  
**A.** No – it’s dependent on what services they receive for their block.

**Q.** Can this meeting spend more time in future on the MRC?  
**A.** Yes, at the moment we are just giving updates but we can certainly increase the time spent discussing the MRC.

7. **Any other business**

**Q.** There are 5 flat blocks with parking issues. We used to have parking permits but haven’t been given new ones this year – where are they?  
**A.** We will look into this for you.

**Q.** A leaseholder said that there was a lot of malicious damage being caused at their block by someone who lived in the block. How many times does this have to happen before SBC take any action? Also could SBC perhaps put up metal grids on windows and doors to prevent the glass from being smashed? They said the flat that used to be for the warden was being used for homeless people.  
**A.** We can investigate but you should take this to the neighbourhood wardens for them to look into.

AM asked if there were any suggestions of items for the next meeting
but there were none.

| 8. | **Date of next meeting** – 13 December 2017 – Autun Room 6.30 to 8.00pm  
Then 28 March 2018 in the Civic Suite. |
