Draft Minutes

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL - Leaseholder Meeting

9 March 2016
6.30pm in the Autun Room, Daneshill House

Present: Stevenage Borough Council, Laura Hodgskin (LH) – Service Manager Leasehold & Lettings, Emma Goff (EG) – Senior Leasehold Advisor, Maureen Herdman (MH) – Resident Involvement Manager - Minutes Dale Minhas (DM) - Leasehold Advisor

Chair: Diane Green (DG)

Emma-Jane Flynn (EJF) – Consultancy Manager South – TPAS (Tenants Participation Advisory Service)

Leaseholders: David Weemys (DW), Jean Sebastian (JS), Amy Harrison (AH), Robert Tregaskis (RT), Karin Endersby (KE), Neil Palmer (NP), Rose Griffin (RG), Brad Glenister (BG), Jo Martins (JM), Salima Sharif (SS), Terry Paget (TP), Sandra Paget (SP), Carolyn Kyprianides (CK), Paul Kyprianides (PK), June Pease (JP)

ITEM ACTION

1. Welcome and apologies;

Welcome to all.

Apologies received from:
Cllr R Broom, J Bunce, P Humphries, P Robins

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

DG went through the last meetings minutes. No questions were raised. Minutes were agreed.

3. Leasehold Engagement

Emma-Jane Flynn, introduced herself, she is a Consultancy Manager for TPAS. TPAS are national tenant engagement experts, established for over 28 years. Over the years TPAS have noted a lot of queries from Leaseholders and they found that there was perhaps a lack of understanding surrounding what is good engagement. Research was undertaken in 2014/15, some leaseholders in
Stevenage took part in the survey, the findings of the survey has contributed to the development of a best practice guide for leaseholder and landlords, it is hoped it will enable greater opportunities for leaseholder influence and inform the management and delivery of leasehold services, across the social housing sector.

Stevenage were part of the core group and helped develop the guide.

The guide can be downloaded from the following link:

**EJF** gave presentation. Follow this link to view presentation slides:

**EJF** mentioned that more than 60% of residents are less than satisfied with landlords. Why do you think this is the case?

**JM** answered he believes it’s because landlords are less committed to keeping leaseholders informed and landlords concentrate on what tenants want rather than leaseholders.

**Affordability**

**EJF** mentioned how it’s good practice to have pre-purchase engagement before properties are purchased. How it’s key for potential leaseholders to have information provided beforehand.

**EG** stated that at SBC we talk to all tenants who wish to purchase their flat under Right to Buy. Service Charges are discussed so they are aware of costs involved once they become a leaseholder.

**LH** stated that one to one meetings are also carried out.

**JM** asked the question what about potential leaseholders who purchase on the open market?

**LH** confirmed it’s much more limited as we only know a flat is being sold when solicitors contact us requesting the pre-sale enquiry pack. The sales packs are very detailed. Potential open market purchasers also sometimes contact SBC directly for information.

**LH** went on to ask if anyone has any further ideas on how we can improve the service.

**RT** stated that it should be mentioned in the packs for potential buyers to contact SBC.

**DG** replied that it is mentioned in the sales pack.

**EG** stated that SBC are keen to find ways for better engagement and take on any suggestions.
Experience Leaseholders
EJF asked the question why do you think leaseholder engage in services?
JS replied to receive information
JM replied to be more satisfied with the service and be more aware of what is going on
EJF stated it’s so leaseholders can be more involved, positive and have more confidence

Major Repairs
EJF explained how major works is the most expensive cost for leaseholders. How there are engagement opportunities for leaseholders to be involved in the procurement process
LH stated there is no sinking fund at SBC but there are generous repayment options.

Customer Inclusion
EJF asked the question: How well do Stevenage Borough Council engage with leaseholders? Can you identify 1 thing that has improved?
EJF asked if anyone has participated in the procurement process. DG answered how she has had the opportunity to visit flats in Coventry and London. How she has learnt a lot and learnt about how to do the marking and followed the process from start to finish. DG went on to say there are so many different ways for leaseholders to get involved such as Resident groups

Maureen Herdman said that this time last year leaseholders were asked at the Leasehold meeting what they would like to talk about in future leasehold meetings. The top 4 subjects chosen for discussion were:

- Major Works
- Estate Inspections
- Caretaking
- Building Insurance

These 4 topics were covered during the meetings in 2015/16.

MH asked the leaseholder what topics would they like to discuss this year and also if 4 meetings a year is the correct number. She also mentioned if there was a reason for additional meetings then these
would be set up.

In groups leaseholders brainstormed topics they would like to discuss. It was agreed that three meetings would be held in 2016/17 on 13 July 2016, 2 November 2016 and 22 February 2017.

The three high priority areas agreed for this year’s meetings were:

- The programme of works for flat blocks – including an explanation on sampling and what happens when the contractor is on site
- Major works – what's been specified, how leaseholders can get involved in letting the contract, how we ensure value for money
- Update on caretaking services, how they are delivered and what to expect

Other suggestions noted were:

- Questions about post inspections and the percentages we do
- Right to Buy receipts and how they are utilised
- Value for money – in relation to how a cost is worked out for an item – i.e. fire door
- Extending their leases and in particular if a 5 year extension could be discussed.

**Resident** asked which blocks have been inspected in regards to major works and what works have been identified?

**LH** replied there are an estimated 90 different architypes and initial surveys are being carried out on a sample of the blocks. We already store initial stock condition information on our Asset Management database, which holds information such as the life-cycle for roofs, windows etc, and this is used in conjunction with the surveys to draft the contract documentation.

**LH** went on to explain that a 5 year programme is in the process of being compiled. Once more details are known we will discuss this with the leaseholders and keep them informed throughout the process. It has not yet been decided which flat will be in what year. LH went on to say how changes by the government in 2015 have meant a 1% rent reduction, which has a significant impact on the Council’s rental income and business plan, and as a result the Council are predicted to lose many millions over the lifespan of the business plan. This has a knock on effect, which has resulted in delays in determining the extent of the major works programme.

**Resident** mentioned that a definitions of major works was just ‘tarting
up’

LH responded under Section 20 of the Landlords Act & Tenants Act 1985 and the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 any cost of £250 to individual flat is classed as Major Works.

JM asked if there was a proposal to for the Leasehold section to be sold off.
LH confirmed that there were no proposals of this nature. LH added it was being considered whether the Leasehold team could potentially provide their services for other organisations and charge a fee for this.

RT asked what were the plans for the replacement of water meters? Affinity Sutton have sent letter to residents advising them it will be compulsory to have a water meter

SBC will look into the water meters and advise residents.

LA explained in light of the decision made earlier by the group, to only have 3 meetings in 2016/17, the 13 April 2016 Leasehold Meeting would be cancelled as it was so close to the 9 March meeting. The leasehold department will send emails to Leaseholders to notify them and it will put on the website also. LH reminded the group that monthly Leasehold Surgeries are available if residents wish to talk about individual queries. The dates for the surgeries can be found on the SBC website.

5. **Leasehold Handbook.**

LH explained how last year there was a working group to help produce the Leasehold Handbook. The new handbook is now available on the SBC website. A copy of the handbook was sent to TPAS who were very impressed. LH thanked the leaseholders who were involved for their time and effort.

6. **Any Other Business**

RT mentioned that the Key Leasehold Repairs was 6 months behind
LH apologised for this, replying that the team are aware and we are working on getting them out on time
DP said she had a query about door entry and she had spoken to someone at SBC about it but wasn’t happy with the outcome
DG suggested she came to the Leasehold Surgery with her query

7. **Date of next meeting – 13 July 2016**