

TOWER HAMLETS COMMUNITY HOUSING

LEASEHOLDERS STEERING GROUP

TUESDAY 21ST JULY 2009

MINUTES

LSG MEMBERS PRESENT

Christina Chesterman	CC	Chapman Street (LSG Chair)
Mike Meir	MM	Gwilym Maries House
Alison Cochrane	AC	Coburg Dwellings
Abraham David	AD	Luke House
Sven Parker	SP	Barnardo Street
Mass Chefa	MC	Lysander House
Julie Snell	JS	William Channing House

LSG MEMBER ABSENT

David Green	DG	Grayling Square
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OBSERVERS PRESENT

Abdul Hannan	AH	Waring House
Thomas Turner	TT	Adam Meere House
Sarah Francis	SF	Bill Faust House

OFFICERS PRESENT

Harneck Chilemba	HAC	THCH Director of Finance
Arum Sivagnanam	AS	THCH Interim Financial Controller
Ajay Gajjar	AG	THCH Revenue Accountant
Farrukh Rouf	FR	THCH Service Charge Accountant
Charlene Conn	CAC	THCH Admin Officer (Minutes)

DISTRIBUTION

All above +	
Mike Tyrrell	- Chief Executive
David Eatwell	- Director of Housing
Peter Exton	- Director of Development
Sheila Bradley	- Corporate Admin Manager
Compton Gustave	- Housing Services Manager
Bridgett Bardwell	- Human Resources Manager
Maryann Lowry	- Lettings Manager
Tracey Bellamy	- Lettings Manager
Andy Coleborn	- Policy & Communications Manager

Glyn Wiltshire	- Repairs & Maintenance Manager
Sirajul Islam	- Community Housing Office Manager – S & W
Mina Rahman	- Community Housing Office Manager – Spit.
Elaine Hamilton	- Community Housing Office Manager – BG
Shamim Hossain	- Community Development Officer
Rene Poole	- Community Development Officer
Annie Evans	- Acting Senior Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1	David Eatwell	Sickness
	Sheila Bradley	Annual Leave
	Ares Zaines	Conflicting Engagement

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 None

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 21ST APRIL 2009

3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 21st April 2009 were **AGREED** as a true and accurate record pending the following amendment:

3.1.1 **Item 6.3** – changes to second sentence in paragraph so it now reads “Walkways adjacent to Southwood Smith House had been closed due to refurbishment work...”

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM TUESDAY 21ST APRIL 2009

4.1	4.3.2.1	HAC was surprised that SP had not received a response and would chase DE on this matter.	HAC – Letter sent by DE to SP dated 24 April 2009.
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4.2	4.10.4.1	As LSG felt that the answer provided seemed inadequate, HAC undertook to ask PE to provide an answer to LSG before the next meeting.	HAC – PE has clarified that the TV Aerial Upgrade relates to some blocks in Spitalfields that are on a 5 line compared to the more recently refurbished blocks that are on 9 line digital cabling.
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4.2.1 Item 4.10.4.1 – MM raised further concerns that the original issue he had was still to be resolved. MM indicated that the offer letter stated that the TV aerial upgrade would be subsidised but in fact the Leaseholders have been charged £230 for the

upgrade. He would like some answers as to why the Leaseholders were charged as this is contradictory to the offer letter. HAC explained that this was an entirely different matter which should have been raised at the Mansford Forum.

4.3 LEASEHOLD MANAGEMENT POLICY

4.3.1 6.2 MM pointed out that, as a consequence of this amendment, paragraph 1.7 of the Leasehold Management Policy also needed to be amended as leaseholders, along with all complainants, no longer had a right to a hearing before a subcommittee of the Board. **HAC – Policy amended.**

4.3.2 6.5 The following amendments to Paragraph 3.1 (i) were proposed and agreed:
• Line 7 – delete brackets including contents which state “to be deleted”, and
• Line 9 – for clarity change “freeholder” to THCH **HAC – Policy amended.**

4.3.3 6.6 MM pointed out that paragraph 7.8 (ii) was incorrect as although THCH could suggest that Leaseholders seek a second mortgage, they were not in a position to offer one. HAC agreed to remove this option and to insert a separate paragraph 7.9 detailing the option of seeking a second mortgage. **HAC – Policy amended.**

4.4 SERVICE CHARGES – CALCULATION OF ANNUAL INCREASES

4.4.1 7.2.1 AS undertook to check this as a matter of urgency and respond to her. **AS – Coburg Dwellings the communal window cleaning charge is credited back fully to the service charge accountant and AC has been informed.**

4.5 MANSFORD AND AVEBURY EAST ESTATES – REFURBISHMENT UPDATE

4.5.1 10.1 MM felt that the report did not reflect information that had been reported at other meetings he attended.

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10.1.1 HAC undertook to seek clarification from PE regarding this.

HAC – PE requested to amend future reports to make clear which new build schemes are funded.

4.6 OUTSTANDING ACTION

4.6.1 11.1.1 HAC apologised and explained that this was a known system flaw and IT were aware further work needed to be done to resolve this for the long-term. Meanwhile, he undertook to advise the Maintenance Team of how to get round the problem.

HAC – Maintenance Team leads has been advised.

4.6.2 11.2 An update on progress on the evaluation report of the Neighbourhood Wardens service outstanding from 18/04/06 was requested. HAC undertook to speak to DE regarding this matter

HAC – A “current status” column now added to report (No. 12 on the agenda) advising members of the latest position.

4.7 MINOR WORKS PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT

4.7.1 12.2 Clarification was sought on the completion date of the dual entry security entrance at Hobsons Place (4.1.9). HAC agreed to refer this to DE for clarification.

DE – Practical completion was agreed on 25th March in order to secure the match funding from LBTH. Completion of all works other than some minor snagging was then agreed on 14th May. There is still one outstanding matter of additional works relating to a PAC reader.

4.7.2 12.3 Clarification was sought on the completion date of the traffic calming measures at Chapman Street security (4.1.11). HAC agreed to refer this to DE for clarification.

DE – Advises that the works were completed on 18th June.

4.8 FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

4.8.1 13.1 It was requested that the Good Neighbour Brochure currently being produced for tenants of leaseholders be brought to the LSG for comment before publication.

DE – The Private Tenants Handbook was signed off as complete on 21st April 2008. The 2nd edition was published on 11th June

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2009.

4.9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 4.9.1 15.1.1 CC reported that she had observed some work taking place on Monday, but HAC agreed to seek clarification on the situation from DE. **DE** – The tender for the new contract has been delayed while the tender documents are amended to incorporate residents' comments.
- 4.9.2 15.2.3 LSG **AGREED** that paragraph 4.2 should be amended to 3 years to correspond with paragraph 5.4 **HAC** – Constitution amended.

5. CHAIRS ACTION

- 5.1 There were none.

6. ELECTION OF BOARD REPRESENTATIVE

- 6.1 HAC explained that to avoid the two LSG representatives on the THCH Board retiring at the same time from the Board, for continuity there is a one year difference for retirement of the Resident Board Directors so that one. Christina Chesterman has served three years and retires at the September 2009 Board meeting while Mike Meir had two more years to serve and will retire in 2011.
- 6.2 HAC explained that, as reported earlier to the Annual General Meeting, although the Chair had intended to step down for personal reasons, recent changes in her personal circumstances meant that she was now able to continue.
- 6.2.1 HAC stated that Christina Chesterman was eligible and willing to stand again as a leaseholder representative on the Board.
- 6.2.2 Members were unanimous in accepting CC as their representative on the Board for a further three years.
- 6.3 The Leaseholders Steering Group:-
- 6.3.1 **AGREED** to appoint Christina Chesterman as a

Leaseholder Board Director for a period of three years from September 2009 until September 2012.

7. MANAGEMENT CHARGES REVIEW

7.1 HAC presented this report. He explained to the members of the LSG that this item had already gone to the Finance & Development Committee (F&D) the week before but the committee wanted to take the LSG's views before making a decision at the F&D meeting in November 2009.

7.2 The members of the LSG raised concern in regards to the proposed increase of the administration charges and could not understand how THCH could justify this new increase. HAC explained that when the administration charges were set five years previous, they were set on the basis of assumptions that lacked the benefit of a track record of what it cost to operate the service. He believed that the initial charges were in the first place set at a level where THCH was not recovering its costs.

7.3 HAC explained to the members of the LSG that administration charge aims to cover the admin costs which relate to the service provided to leaseholders as set out under 4.1 of the report.

7.4 The LSG did not agree with paying towards the recovery of leaseholder debtors including legal proceedings and court costs or tracing missing leaseholders. HAC drew to their attention 4.16 of the report which states that the charge does not include legal fees estimated at £40,000 for 2009/10 and that THCH would aim to recover its legal costs directly from leaseholders it has had to take legal action against.

7.5 The members of the LSG asked for the charges to be squeezed as much as possible to reduce the cost attributable to leaseholders. They asked if LSG papers and service charge statements could instead be e-mailed to leaseholders who had internet access, as this would save officers time and save money on printing, postage and stationary costs. THCH should actively promote the use of Direct debits and On-line payment methods.

- 7.5.1 HAC said that he the figure of £209 had been arrived at after a meticulous exercise of excluding any time staff on non-leasehold matters. However, he appreciated the points being made about automating processes as much as possible in the future and he would review the charge to take account of the impact of further automation and efficiencies. **HAC - This is in hand.**
- 7.6 HAC said that he was encouraged by the constructive suggestions being made and added that another cost saving point members may wish to consider was whether they would want to do away with the LSG in order to save costs.
- 7.6.1 Members were unanimous in their view that the LSG served as a unique platform for focusing on matters of specific interest to leaseholders and they wished to retain it. Members made it clear that neither Area Residents Boards nor the Joint Area Board gave the degree of focus on their issues that they required. Although one of the observers present queried whether the LSG meeting was really necessary.
- 7.7 It was highlighted that while THCH had already not been recovering its costs for a number of years, it was not intended to recover the losses from the previous years. Instead, THCH would bear further losses as the £209 charge would be phased in over three years.
- 7.8 CC asked that notification of these increases goes out to all Leaseholders as soon as possible so they have time to consider them.
- 7.8.1 HAC agreed. He stated that it was intended to consult all leaseholders about the increase in the charges well before they came into force and that the LSG discussion was the start of that process. **HAC - Consultation starting in September 2009.**
- 7.9 The Leaseholders Steering Group **NOTED** that, with effect from the year ending 31st March 2011, THCH's service charges may include:

- 15% Management Charges for tenants as at present;
- 9% Management Charges for leaseholders; and
- £209.00 plus RPI+0.5% Leaseholder Administration Charges but the increase between current charge of £77.22 and £209.00 to be phased in equal installments over three years.

8. SHARED OWNERSHIP MANAGEMENT POLICY

8.1 The Leaseholders Steering Group **NOTED** the Shared Ownership Management Policy.

9. ANNUAL COMPLAINTS & MEMBERS ENQUIRIES - ANNUAL REPORT

9.1 The members of the LSG raised serious concerns in regards to the use of the complainants' initials being disclosed in the report. They felt that this could be seen as breach of the Data Protection Act. It was observed that complaints should be confidential but as the report stood it was possible to identify who the complaint was from through a combination of the initials and property address. HAC said that he would arrange with SB for this column to be removed from the report in future.

SB – The column will be removed from next year's annual report.

9.2 The Leaseholders Steering Group **AGREED** to:

9.2.1 NOTE the report.

10. PRIVATE TENANTS HANDBOOK

10.1 AD expressed concern that private tenants would not pay attention to the rules in the handbook. CC asked how the handbooks were going to be delivered to the private tenants. AG explained that they would be mailed out to the relevant properties that private tenants are living in. He said his team was currently building up the knowledge of new private tenants moving into leasehold properties.

10.2 AC explained to members that she was disappointed with the new version of the Private Tenants Handbook. She felt that the article that was put in Update in April 2009 on being a good

neighbour was much better, more specific, and more dramatic. She felt that this handbook was weak on points. She was hoping that the points in Update would have been included in the handbook.

10.3 MM felt that the wording on page 4 to the handbook was very poor. HAC asked MM that he e-mailed DE with the editing issues he had.

10.4 The members of the LSG felt that it would be a good idea that a poster be put up in all block entrances with the “being a good neighbour” rules clearly stated on it so that all residents could see and read it.

10.5 CC said that she had experience of contractors working in anti-social hours of the day. She asked that a paragraph goes into the handbook in regards to the hours it was acceptable for contractors to be working on the estates and also a paragraph regarding the times that noise is considered to be a nuisance. **DE** - confirms that this amendment has been made for future editions of the Handbook.

10.6 TT asked that a THCH e-mail contact also goes into the handbook with the other THCH contact details. **DE** - confirms that this amendment has been made for future editions of the Handbook.

10.7 The Leaseholders Steering Group:

10.7.1 **COMMENTED** on the Private Tenants Handbook attached as Appendix One.

11. MANSFORD AND AVEBURY EAST ESTATES – REFURBISHMENT UPDATE

11.1 That the Leaseholder Steering Group **NOTED** the progress:

11.1.1 In the refurbishment of the transferred estates.

11.1.2 Of the new build on the transferred estates.

12. OUTSTANDING ACTION

12.1 The Leaseholders Steering Group members **NOTED** action outstanding as outlined in section four of this report.

13. MINOR WORKS PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT

13.1 The Leaseholders Steering Group **NOTED** the report.

14. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

14.1 TT asked for an update report on whether it would be possible for the LSG papers and Service Charge Statements to be e-mailed to Leaseholders with internet access. **HAC** - This is being investigated

15. ARTICLES FOR UPDATE

15.1 There were none.

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

16.1 There were none.

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS (WITHOUT OFFICERS PRESENT)

17.1 There were none.

18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

18.1 The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 20th October 2009.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting closed at 8:35pm

Signed.....

Dated.....