

## **TOWER HAMLETS COMMUNITY HOUSING**

### **LEASEHOLDERS STEERING GROUP**

**TUESDAY 20 APRIL 2010**

#### **MINUTES**

##### **LSG MEMBERS PRESENT**

Christina Chesterman	(CC)	Chapman Street (LSG Chair)
Mike Meir	(MM)	Gwilym Maries House
Sven Parker	(SP)	Barnardo Street
Julie Snell	(JS)	William Channing House

##### **LSG MEMBERS ABSENT**

David Green	(DG)	Grayling Square
Mass Chefa	(MC)	Lysander House

##### **OBSERVERS PRESENT**

Fred Hunt	(FH)	Hector House
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##### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

Harneck Chilemba	(HAC)	THCH Director of Finance
Arum Sivagnanam	(AS)	THCH Financial Controller
Ajay Gajjar	(AG)	THCH Revenue Accountant
Sheila Bradley	(SB)	THCH Corporate Admin Manager (Minutes)

##### **DISTRIBUTION**

All above+	
Mike Tyrrell	Chief Executive
Peter Exton	Director of Development
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 – Shadwell
Mina Rahman	Community Housing Office Manager – Spitalfields
Elaine Hamilton	Community Housing Office Manager – Bethnal Green
Shamim Hossain	Community Development Officer
Rene Poole	Community Development Officer
Annie Evans	Senior Project Manager

## **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 Apologies were received from the following members:

- Alison Cochrane – On holiday
- Abraham David – On holiday
- Thomas Turner – Conflicting appointment
- Ares Zaines – Stranded abroad due to volcano

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

2.1 None.

**Items 6 and 7 were taken at this point so that the Financial Controller could present these and leave as the reports author was unavailable.**

## **3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 19 JANUARY 2010**

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2010 were agreed as a true and accurate record pending the following amendment:-

3.1.1 Paragraph 8.2: Delete last sentence starting with “DE confirmed.....”

**SB**

## **4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING OF 19 JANUARY 2010**

### **LEASEHOLDERS MANAGEMENT CHARGES**

4.1 **6.6.1** - LSG members asked whether a breakdown of the charges per area for example the costs of maintaining the LSG could be brought to the LSG and whether admin charges could be scrutinised. HAC responded that the income collected and expenditure section of the quarterly accounts report could be expanded to include this

**FR – In progress**

4.1.1 In response to a query from MM as to when it was envisaged that this information would be available, HAC replied that it should be available from the first quarter of 2010/11

### **OUTSTANDING ACTION**

4.2 **12.1** It was agreed that items 4, 5 and 6 on the table under section 4 of the report were now complete and should be deleted from further reports.

**SB – These have now been deleted.**

- 4.2.1 **12.2** It was also agreed that item 3 should be amended to read – “Report on possibility of Service Charge statements being e-mailed to leaseholders with internet access”. **SB** – This has been amended

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS (WITHOUT OFFICERS PRESENT)**

- 4.3 **16.2** SB asked that as LSG members appeared unhappy that couriers were being used to deliver papers, would members prefer that her team used first class post for distribution to reduce costs. It was suggested that second class post could be used but SB pointed out that could mean receipt of papers was late not enabling members sufficient time to read them and she was not sure that would be practical. It was agreed that first class post would be used for distribution if members did not choose for papers to be emailed. **SB** – First class post now being used to distribute LSG papers if email distribution not requested.

**5. CHAIRS ACTION**

- 5.1 None.

**6. RESIDENTS COMMUNICATION THROUGH NEW TECHNOLOGIES**

- 6.1 HAC spoke to the report, explaining that both the Merge IT and Text Messaging projects were works in progress. A further report would come back to LSG in the future. When fully implemented, it was hoped that the new technology would replace letters, although it was envisaged that there would always be a residual number of residents who did not want to buy into new technology for a variety of reasons.

- 6.1.1 Although all leaseholders had been contacted, responses had only been received from 36 which was disappointing. However, it was hoped that more contact details would be supplied by leaseholders in the near future and the system would be cost effective over time.

- 6.1.2 It was suggested that an extra charge could be levied for paper correspondence like that already charged by BT, but it was explained that THCH has a statutory duty to ensure information is passed to leaseholders. Therefore, a charge would not be in keeping with that duty.

- 6.1.3 The possibility of a resident portal was currently being discussed, as were many other opportunities to use new

technology to allow THCH to work as cost effectively as possible.

6.2 HAC explained that, whilst email could be used for routine and cyclical matters, such as Service Charge statements, the text messaging system would be used for more dynamic issues such as repair appointment reminders.

6.2.1 MM had been invited to take part in the text messaging pilot but had found it very complicated to get any information from the system. Whilst he was mindful of the need for security, it was not always practical to have the necessary codes and account numbers to hand. HAC asked MM to feed his comments to Farrukh Rouf in Finance.

6.3 The LSG **NOTED:**

6.3.1 the progress of the IT Merge project; and

6.3.2 the results and the completion of the text messaging pilot.

## **7. SERVICE CHARGE ACCOUNTS Y/E 31.03.10 (QUARTER 4)**

7.1 AS spoke to the report, drawing LSG members' attention to the variances detailed in the report. Concern was expressed by members that a number of items were showing an overspend against budget.

7.1.1 Leaseholders were concerned that officers needed to get better at setting realistic budgets and asked what redress they had.

7.1.2 It was explained that expenditure over budget may not be down to incorrect procurement or poor budget setting; actual costs could be higher than expected or unexpected situations could arise.

7.2 It was felt that tight control should be exercised on all contractors, with recharging of contractors or other agencies used where appropriate. Leaseholders were reminded to report any contractor malpractice immediately to the relevant CHO.

7.3 HAC reminded LSG that leaseholders were charged on the actual costs, as opposed to the budgeted costs, and all leaseholders would be invited to inspect all invoices once the accounts had been audited. It was envisaged that the inspection of the accounts would probably take place in early

September.

- 7.4 LSG **NOTED** the income and expenditure for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010.

**8. MANSFORD AND AVEBURY EAST ESTATES – REFURBISHMENT UPDATE**

- 8.1 The Leaseholders Steering Group **NOTED** the completion of the Mansford and Avebury East estates refurbishment programme.

- 8.2 The Leaseholders Steering Group **NOTED** the progress on the new build developments on the transferred estates

**9. MINOR WORKS PROGRAMME 2008/9**

- 9.1 A shared owner who was unable to attend the meeting had raised his concern by email.

- 9.1.1 His concern related to the £10,000 each ARB is allowed to spend on minor works. He was concerned that this money may not be spent for the benefit of all residents and would cause disagreements. He also wondered why the LSG was not allocated a similar budget.

- 9.1.2 The Director of Housing had responded to the concern by a note to LSG explaining that the ARBs represent the whole of THCH's residents and offer the opportunity, therefore, for all residents to have a say in what improvements they feel are required to their homes. Leaseholders are able to contribute to that equally with tenants.

- 9.2 The LSG **NOTED** the Minor, Planned and Cyclical Programme Progress Report

**10. BOARD STRUCTURE CONSULTATION**

- 10.1 HAC spoke to the report and asked the LSG to consider the three options detailed in the report

- 10.2 In response to a query from CC, who asked what ramifications there may be for THCH if they chose to remain with the current structure, HAC responded that it could be seen in the eyes of the regulatory body that THCH was going against its trade body's best practice and its own Code of Governance. He further explained that SMT did not have a preferred option and

would be guided by the Board.

10.3 After a discussion regarding the options suggested, including the observation that the way resident board members are elected may need to be addressed, as previously one member had been expelled from the Board for non-attendance, but then re-elected by their ARB. The LSG **ADVISED** the Board that their preferred Board structure was:-

10.3.1 Option 1, for the Board to remain at its current size but with the resident directors make up to be adjusted to five tenants and 3 leaseholders to more accurately reflect the make up of the community.

10.3.2 LSG's reasoning for their preferred choice was that the THCH Board should reflect its ethos as a resident-led organisation.

## **11. RE-ELECTION OF LSG MEMBERS**

11.1 After an explanation from SB regarding selection process outlined in the LSG constitution, the LSG **DECIDED** that the option they wished to adopt was to:-

11.1.1 Amend the LSG Constitution at the Annual General meeting of the LSG on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2010 to allow existing members to stand for re-election by means of a vote at the October meeting of the LSG.

11.2 The recruitment process suggested in the report of inviting all leaseholders to the AGM, advising them of the change to the constitution and asking them to contact SB if they were interested in membership of the LSG, was approved. LSG felt that this was the most open, yet cost effective, and time efficient recruitment method.

## **12. OUTSTANDING ACTION**

12.1 HAC was uncertain whether the proposed upgrade to the Housing Management System would enable it to differentiate between communal repairs reported by residents or officers, but he undertook to check with IT.

**HAC**

## **13. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

13.1 None.

## **14. ARTICLES FOR UPDATE**

14.1 None.

**15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

15.1 In response to a query regarding debt collection methods, HAC responded that whilst it was not appropriate to discuss a leaseholder's individual case in the meeting, it should be pointed out that there was a very good business case to ensure that all debts were recovered.

15.2 HAC informed LSG that AG would be leaving THCH at the end of April to return to his previous career in debt collection and thanked him for using his specialised knowledge in reducing arrears in THCH over the past year.

15.2.1 LSG members with urgent queries relating to outstanding arrears were encouraged to speak to AG swiftly to help to ensure a smooth handover.

**16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS (WITHOUT OFFICERS PRESENT)**

16.1 Diligence should be taken to ensure all costs were kept down.

**17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

17.1 The date of the next LSG meeting was confirmed as 20 July 2010.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting closed at 8.50pm

Signed:.....

Dated:.....