

Leasehold Forum – Thursday 21st March 2019

Community Hall, Harrow Rd, Langley

Minutes

Attendees – Colin Moone (CM), - SBC - Service Lead, Strategic Housing Services
Stuart Aislabie, Principal Asset Manager (SA), SBC
Mark Reynolds, Project Manager (MR), SBC
Amanda Talbot (AT) SBC - Leasehold & Right to Buy Manager
Alison Lane (AL), SBC - Leasehold Service Charge & RTB Officer
Anita Herbert (AH), Community Investment Officer (Osborne)

5 Leaseholders (LH) in attendance

CM invited everybody around the room to introduce themselves. CM also agreed to chair the meeting and went through the Agenda and then the minutes.

1 Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) – Doors

MR confirmed following the Grenfell tragedy the specification is being reviewed by the industry. Last week directive fire door regulations, caveat's design fire door were released. He explained the new door is to be fitted, however the architrave will not make it certified and this would need testing. A door replacement programme will follow following the completion of general fire risk assessments. Refresher audits will begin in April 2019 against the new guidelines that have been issued and cross referencing will be done.

One LH asked how much the costs would be for a new door and frame that is certified. No prices have yet been confirmed, discussions are in place on how to resolve the issue if LH's have already paid but yet to get a door fitted.

2 Buy Backs

SA introduced himself and explained his role with regard to buy backs. He advised the Council are interested in buy back properties any anyone wishing to sell in the next two years can contact us. The Council would consider making an offer for the property at full market value. The benefits are that there are no agent fees if agreed to purchase sale can go through with a quick turnaround (estimated 8-12 weeks), with the property bought as seen.

SA advised the second option is to sell to JEH Homes, either route will not affect the offer price.

A LH asked would the Council be interested in one bedroom flats and it was confirmed that they would be.

3. Lease Extensions

SA informed the audience that as a lease reaches 70 years or less the banks / lenders will not always want to lend on a property with lower years remaining on the lease. He advised leaseholders to consider a lease extension around the 80 years remaining mark.

SA explained the leaseholder (if they wish) can serve a notice on the Council and the leaseholder arranges a survey, valuation and solicitor to extend the lease request, this is a statutory process and this will extend the lease by 90 years. If the lease is extended using this option the ground rent turns into a peppercorn rent.

The Council also offers the option to deal with this on an informal basis. The leaseholder should approach the Council with this request. The Council will carry out a valuation and will offer the leaseholder to surrender the remaining years on their current lease and they will then be reissued with a 99 or 125 year lease for a premium.

The premium costs will depend on value of the flat / maisonette and how many years currently remain on the lease.

If the lease has less than 70 years remaining then the premium cost increases that is payable to the Council. The costs are £300 for the actual valuation to make an offer but the total surveyors fees are £600 the other £300 is payable if they go ahead and complete. The leaseholder will also be required to pay SBC legal costs which are in the region of £800. SA also confirmed that an indicative cost figure can be given at time of application.

Leaseholders can go to lease advice - <https://www.lease-advice.org/calculator/> which may give an indication of costs.

4. Osborne - Repairs

MR explained the partnership between Slough Borough Council and Osborne which began 15 months ago. He advised that Osborne have had a restructure for their delivery module and they have put changes in place using outside contractors to deliver the services. They believe that this a more efficient way of maintaining quality control/quality checking with IT interfacing.

MR advised as the contract progresses efficiently will be monitored and how it is carried out and the aim is to have a first time fix.

There is a Task and Review Group between SBC and Osborne. It has been identified that there have been failings in the service and complaints have been raised. MR further advised that processes are being altered. The Task Group will continue to monitor the service and the ongoing restructure at Osborne whose aim is to provide a long ongoing service to SBC and ways of improving the service.

A LH brought up an issue where he sublets the property and there was a blockage in the drain. This was reported to Osborne who failed to send an Operative on the

Thursday or Friday. The LH spent 6 hours waiting and an Operative turned up at 8PM on the Friday night. The tenant could not use his washing machine – MR advised that Osborne should have responded to him.

MR went on to advise that Osborne are also currently looking at their Contact Centre and the failings to ensure future diagnostics are clear and logged and the appropriate operatives have an understanding and are placed in the correct job. They are also training their contact centre operatives to have training on customer service and technical knowledge and are able to identify what is an emergency and how it is responded too. Communal works will incur block costs to which residents pay a proportion of the cost.

MR also mentioned that discussions are currently taking place with Thames Water to agree responsibility of works and build up a positive joint up working ethic.

LH advised that he had a power cut 3 weeks ago and he called Osborne and was advised that because he was a leaseholder they could not take the call, however, when they did they did respond in ½ hour.

MR further advised that they are reviewing communications and explained that the processes have highlighted the need for improved communication for example informing a resident if a job requires rebooking.

5. Service Charges

AT advised that the estimated service charges for the year 19/20 that were issued in February 2019 are based on the last 3 years actual costs to try and create an accurate estimate. The invoices will be issued shortly and due for payment on the 1st April 2019, the cut off date for the LH's to request an instalment plan was the 4th March 2019. AT further advised instalment plans after this date and the Council do not offer direct debts at this stage for service charges but is looking into this and she is hoping that this option maybe implemented next year.

AT also confirmed that a F&Q sheet was issued with the estimates to which we hope leaseholders found the information useful.

AT advised that the Leasehold Team do experience a high level of queries during this time via phone calls and emails and its is best to contact Leaseholdservices@slough.gov.uk for a response.

AT advised that the ground rent is due for payment 1st April 2019 and payments can not be accepted until the invoices have been generated.

Community Projects

Anita from Osborne engaged with the leaseholders advising of other projects Osborne are involved in.

Any other Business

1. CM advised that with effect from the 1st April 2019 additional services will be falling under his remit in Housing Services: Repairs / maintenance / voids / caretaking / cleaning / complaints it forms part of the reorganisation to streamline the service.
2. AH asked that LH complete a short questionnaire and advised the residents what they would like to see going on in the community such as workshops, business advice as Osborne would like to try and potentially help.
3. AH further advised that Osborne are recruiting two business administrator apprenticeships and are holding an Open day. There posts are not age restricted and applicants would require GCSE's in maths and English and the posts offer level 2 and 3 in training and obtaining a qualification.
4. LH raised issue of water meters in Poplar House are behind locked doors in the duct room. AL to ask Housing Officer to advise on access
5. LH also raised that he nearly got trapped in the lifts a few days ago he believes that with all the refurbishment going on, lifts are not always available – the one on the left hand side he feels requires attention – AL to raise order with Osborne – WO: 0064640
6. LH raised concern that due to refurb the car parking spaces for residents are limited.
7. It was agreed to try and arrange next meeting for September 2019 – date to be confirmed

Colin Moone thanked everybody for attending and any action points would be raised by an Officer(s) in the Leasehold Team to the relevant sections / departments.