

Minutes

Leaseholder Forum

12th March 2009

17:00 – 19:00

Boardroom, 14 Hounds Gate



Present: Sam Else (SE), Simon Temporal (ST), Jon Short (JS) (notes), Richard Holland (RH) – NCH Interim Head of Rents, Chris Bailey (CBail) – NCC Street Scene, Ann Gardner (AG), Jennie Bellamy (JB), Sheila Thwaites (ShThw), Sandra Stones (SS), Audrey Davies (AD), Anna Rogers, Robin Stalvies, Carol Brown (CB), Jim Allabarton (JA), Michael Whitehead, Maria Hemphill (Tenant Representative) (MH)

Apologies: Alison Roberts, Kate Bowley, Paul & Bernis Barrow, Stan Bellamy, Graham Ward, Val Cleaves, Iris Yu

	Items	Action
1.0	Minutes from previous meeting 12 January 2009	
	<p>In the absence of Kate Bowley, ShThw Vice Chair of the Leaseholder Forum opened the meeting and thanked all for attending.</p> <p>The Chair went through the Minutes and the following points were addressed.</p> <p>SE said she would find out the fee involved in taking a case to the LVT – SE advised that the maximum fee was £500 but there was no indication of the minimum fee but SE did stress that Leaseholders should refer to the LVT website for further clarification.</p> <p>AG asked about the new Leaseholder Handbook – SE advised that this was due to be distributed in April.</p> <p>Robin Stalvies mentioned that he attended the meeting but was not mentioned on the Attendance list the Minutes will be amended to reflect this and page numbering will be added in future for ease of reference.</p> <p>13/03/2009 – JS updated Minutes from the previous Forum and has updated Minutes to include page numbers for ease of reference in future.</p>	<p>JS</p>

2.0	Grounds Maintenance Update	
	<p>CBail from Street Scene addressed the Forum and said that he or another representative from Street Scene would be happy to attend future Forums to continue dialogue with Leaseholders and wants Leaseholders to challenge Street Scene if they feel they are not receiving the service or are encountering problems.</p> <p>CBail had brought in copies of the Street Scene specification which detailed all the work provided – these were to be handed around after CBail had finished speaking.</p> <p>CBail stressed how important it was for Leaseholders to keep Street Scene informed when work is not being done, he wants an open dialogue between Leaseholders & Street Scene as Leaseholders are paying for the service and want to make sure they are getting the service that they pay for.</p> <p>CBail referred to a previous Audit Commission Inspection which mentioned that nobody seemed to be looking after issues on the Estates such as parking etc.</p> <p>CBail said this report made them think about these issues and they had started working on litter, graffiti and dumping of waste (fly tipping) – CBail said that it is not just about cutting grass.</p> <p>He referred to Minutes of a previous Forum where the comment was made that Street Scene were only making the effort for the Inspection – CBail categorically said that this was not the case and that Street Scene had done a lot of work last year to build bridges – discussions between NCC & NCH had not been good but staff have been working closely with tenants, leaseholders and NCH Officers to improve the relationship. CBail said the question of money dominates everything they do and it is part of his job to hold people to account and question the costs.</p> <p>CBail reiterated that he would be happy to come along to future Forums should the need arise and then opened the floor to questions.</p> <p>AD mentioned the Windmill Lane area and the fact that the hedges had been cut back – and both she and SS</p>	<p>CBail to investigate all issues raised at the meeting</p>

mentioned fly-tipping at the back of the school – CBail took these comments on board and said that he could provide the names of the staff responsible for that area and their contact numbers for future reference. AD said that holes had been left in the pavement where the hedges had been removed – CBail said that he would provide written responses to any queries through either the Chair of the Forum or the LRRT.

SS asked about the team composition – CBail said Street Scene were part of NCC and there were 450 people in the team who were responsible for street cleaning, litter picking, grounds maintenance work, hedges and trees for NCH.

CB said that they were not doing enough about fly-tipping- CBail said that it depends on the extent of the problem but these issues can be reported to the local Area Housing Office or to Street Scene directly.

AG had looked through the specification and noted that it referred to raking leaves – this is something that she has never seen done in the 20 years she has been on Cherry Orchard Mount – CBail took down the details and will investigate.

MH and AG both referred to fly-tipping taking place at the recycling centre on Elmbridge Road.

CBail said that some people had recently been caught fly-tipping in the Bestwood area which proves that reporting these incidents does work.

CBail said that incidents of ASB should be reported to the dedicated **Street Scene ASB hotline 0115 915 2020**.

ShThw said that it takes time for people to unload these items so somebody must see something and there is often CCTV around so the perpetrators can be seen on film.

CBail said that Community Protection Officers had a more important role to play in dealing with this issue – recent surveys show that people care about where they live and what it looks like and there are lots of resources available for people to access to resolve such matters.

MH wanted to know where in Bestwood these fly-tippers

had been caught (Beckhampton Road) MH said that she had made use of these resources to report such issues and had always received a favourable response.

BP brought up the issue of an overgrown tree on Brightmoor Court –he complained about this and was told something would be done to reduce its size – in actual fact the wrong tree had been cut down – CBail is to look into this as there was talk of the tree being cut down to a height of 3.5m but this does not appear to have been done.

ShThw said that around Newark Crescent a lot of grass is cut when there is no grass there and wanted to know if there was a policy in place to sprinkle grass seed – in response CBail said a lot of their work was done on a day to day basis and there were a lot of changes in relation to what schemes were in place in different areas – incidents of this nature should be reported to **Street Scene** directly on **0115 915 2000**.

CBail noted that the areas in questions were blocks 2-18 & 20-36 of Newark Crescent.

AD reported that around her block in Newark Crescent the front is perfect but the back was often neglected and looked like a ploughed field as the grass was often left to grow – CBail took a note of this and would investigate.

SS – there is some 6’ high fencing around Newark Crescent and there is a lock on the gate – bottles are often thrown over the fence and these should be collected. SS also said that the back of her block (1-17) was enclosed and they often forget to do the back area and all the leaves get blown into the outhouses – CBail will look into both these matters.

AG mentioned that if grass is cut in wet weather wet grass is left on the paths around Cherry Orchard Mount and this can be lethal – CBail said he can identify which teams do which areas so these comments can be passed on to them.

CB said that around Wickens Walk rather than grass verges they have weed verges and they never tidy up – CBail will look into this.

	<p>ST asked whether Street Scene had any Monitoring Officers like the Caretaking & Cleaning service do – CBail said that they do not have this and are happy to use feedback from Leaseholders as a way of monitoring the service. CBail said they already work closely with the Tenant Services Inspectors so are already receiving more information.</p> <p>JB asked if there was any policy in place regarding moss on the footpaths as this is in evidence on Wyton Close – CBail said he would look into the position regarding this.</p> <p>ShThw thanked CBail for attending the meeting and he left the room.</p>	
3.0	Management Fee Update	
	<p>ST addressed the Forum and said that LRRT had undertaken time sheet analysis throughout January and the amount of actual chargeable time spent on service charges. We will be consulting the whole City regarding our proposals. ST said there were seasonal variations in the amount of time spent on service charges – when the service charges are being produced then 100% of our time is spent on them. The results of the time-sheet analysis have been collated and work is underway to draw up proposals to change the fee. No date for the next Management Review meeting has been scheduled as we have to pass the proposals through both NCC & NCH Finance before we can reveal them.</p>	
4.0	Importance of the Leaseholder Forum	
	<p>SE said what do the Leaseholders want to get out of the Leaseholder Forum?</p> <p>SE met with Kate Bowley and they had drawn up a Forward Plan, as the Forum is not always about what LRRT want but also what the Leaseholders want.</p> <p>SE went through some of the items referred to on the Forward Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sub-letting issues – although Leaseholders are entitled to let out their properties, it is imperative that LRRT are provided with their contact details in cases of emergency etc - Plain English guide to leasehold ownership – this is being produced and LRRT will work with Leaseholders to make sure this meets their needs. - Management Fee Review – this is likely to take 	

place in April, Leaseholders will be invited along to the meeting and this will be in the evening to ensure as many as possible can attend.

- Northgate Service Charge module – aim to improve the current system – quarterly repairs sheets will be sent out so Leaseholders can see what they are going to be charged for soon after the repairs have been done rather than 18 months later.
- Re-launch Leaseholder Repairs Scheme – the information regarding this has been drawn up.
- Major works – Leaseholders are not always made aware of the work that is being done and the likely cost – this information will help them to budget accordingly.
- Customer Profiling – finding out more about our customers will help NCH tailor the leasehold service to meet their needs.
- Leaseholder Survey – this is likely to take place in April/May. This year’s results will be compared with last years.

The Forward Plan is to be sent out with the Minutes and will include a form allowing Leaseholders to suggest other matters they may wish to discuss at future Forums.

AD asked why should Leaseholders pay for repairs to NCH buildings – SE said that the Leasehold covenants states that Leaseholders should pay ‘a fair proportion’ of the costs incurred by NCC in maintaining the buildings.

Newark Crescent Leaseholders then mentioned the painting work which is currently being carried out there and stated that they were not happy as the work was very expensive.

SE said that NCH had correctly followed the Section 20 consultation procedure.

ST said that at the moment the costs indicated to them were estimates as we would not know the actual cost until the work has been completed – the original cost of the work was £380 but this has since been re-evaluated and had reduced as doors were not included in the scheme. ST said that NCH DLO won the tender to do the work and some Forum members would have been involved in choosing the contractor.

CB mentioned a friend of hers who works in property management for another organisation and said a lot of charges depend on what it says in the Lease and also whether or not there is a sinking fund in place which could be used for any major works invoices.

ST said that aging buildings will from time to time require major works to maintain them. He also said that often during the RTB process – the rights and responsibilities of Leaseholders were not always fully explained so Leaseholders were often surprised when they received Invoices for large amounts.

CT asked if it was possible for them to have a sinking fund – both SE & ST said that this is not stipulated in their Lease so we would need to draw up a deed of variation for every Lease which could be very costly and every Leaseholder would have to be consulted on this before any action would be taken.

SE said that if NCH take the debt in-house then we would be able to offer interest instalment plans to alleviate some of the financial pressures on Leaseholders. It was also mentioned that we don't charge interest on the payment plans but they would be agreed by NCH at their discretion and would be dependent on the amount of the invoice as to the term that could be offered.

BP said that there were 4 blocks at Brightmoor Court but all the repairs were charged on one block. ST explained how the block audit had been conducted and blocks were determined based on roof span – BP was under the impression that both the Leaseholders in Brightmoor Court had been segregated – ST explained that this was not the case at all, it was just coincidental that both flats 1 & 2 which had been bought were in the same block – BP would be charged half of the cost of any repairs undertaken to his block and would not be charged for any repairs relating to the other 3 blocks in Brightmoor Court.

ST/SE explained that with the new Leaseholder Module – comprehensive training would be provided to all Repairs Contact Centre staff to ensure they did not place all repairs on the same block – or choose the easiest option and place them on the first block which appears when they locate the complex on the system.

BP wanted us to review the new system as he still felt he was being penalised for being a Leaseholder – ST said this can be re-addressed but the whole City would have to be re-visited too as it would not be fair to change one block and not all the others.

There then followed a discussion where some Leaseholders in attendance asked why should they pay when tenants don't and how most of them were Pensioners who simply couldn't afford all these bills and tenants who were on Housing Benefit didn't even pay Rent and paid £3 a year extra. RH said that this was not the case when they actually paid £3 per week extra. RH said that the average weekly rent was approx £60 per week. With regards to them getting HB this came from a central government pool and recipients were entitled to receive it.

RH said in the current economic climate people were struggling nationwide – RH has organised an event in the Council House in the Market Square on 29 April. Over 30 organisations will be represented including Credit Unions, Banks etc – they will be on hand to offer advice and assistance to help customers deal with their finances during the present time. As an organisation NCH are looking to come up with other ways of people paying – it was reiterated that the cost of service charges can be spread over 10 months by arrangement with the Sundry Income Dept at NCC.

Several attendees referred to the £165 million pounds which NCH are getting as a result of our recent Inspection result – RH said we were not been given this amount but that we just had permission to borrow this amount.

AG said that she signed something several years ago which said she wouldn't have to pay for major works – SE said it would be interesting to know what this was and what it actually said so asked AG if she could forward a copy of this to LRRT.

ST said that a leasehold flat was a sellable asset and it was therefore necessary to maintain the exterior as well – ST pointed out that a lot of repairs had been done in the past which the Leaseholders hadn't been charged for due to irregularities with the block breakdowns.

	<p>ShThw said the charges should be limited to their income as they simply can't afford it – it was mentioned that we understood their position but we all have bills to pay not just the Leaseholders and we all have to find extra income.</p> <p>Planned works is a big issue and SE suggested the best idea may be to get somebody from Planned Maintenance to come along to the next Forum as they would be best served to answer their queries – a schedule of rates was included in the tender which some Leaseholders were involved with. This is to be the main agenda item in the next Forum.</p> <p>CT said her husband had worked out that operatives were being paid around £36 p/h to complete this painting work and they weren't so much arguing about paying, it was the amount they were being charged they were unhappy about.</p> <p>SE/ST both said that all the costs which appeared on the service charge invoices had been provided by other areas of NCC/NCH so we were not the best people to answer their queries in this area.</p> <p>ST pointed out that tenants door frames were included in the main structure of the building – Leaseholders then said so we will be paying for tenants door frames to be painted which they thought was unfair.</p> <p>MH said that every repair has a cost to it and they (tenants) don't get them for nothing.</p>	
5.0	What two stars means to Leaseholders?	
	<p>SE said that we are working towards the recommendations highlighted by the Audit Commission at the last Inspection which centred around a few key areas, management charge, communal repairs and sending out quarterly statements so leaseholders can check what they are to be charged for and Payment options was also highlighted.</p> <p>SE mentioned that LRRT were re-establishing the Nottinghamshire benchmarking group which we are hosting on 2 April and so far 10 authorities from across the region have expressed an interest in joining.</p>	

6.0	Introduction to Richard Holland – Interim Head of Rents	
	<p>RH addressed the Forum and said he was the Interim Head of Rents and had been tasked with looking after LRRT and work with them to ensure the views of Leaseholders were taken into account.</p> <p>He again mentioned the Financial Inclusion day and said the DWP, FSA and Insurance providers would be there and the aim of the day was to put more money into people's pockets. This will be advertised in the next Tenant & Leaseholder Newsletter and money savings tips will be sent out in a guide. RH invited all to attend as they may find some information to benefit them.</p> <p>RH intends to come to as many Forums as possible and will feed back to the Executive Management Team so they are aware of developments amongst Leaseholders.</p> <p>AG/ShThw referred to a Gas booklet which was mentioned at a previous meeting they attended but have heard no more about it and haven't received the booklet. SE said we would look into this for them.</p> <p>ShThw closed the meeting and thanked all for attending and confirmed date of next meeting.</p>	SE
	<p>Date of next meeting: Monday 18 May 2009 Time: 5.00 pm Venue: 14 Hounds Gate</p>	