



Haringey Leaseholders' Association

Run by Leaseholders for Leaseholders

Minutes of the 2007 Annual General Meeting

Held on Wednesday, 25 July 2007 at 7:00pm
at the Civic Centre, Wood Green

Those present: see separate list available on request

1. Welcome and introduction

Nick Martin-Clark, the current HLA Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and officially opened the meeting. He acknowledged the need to have 30 people present to conduct the elections, which had been slightly exceeded.

Councillor Isidorus Diakides, the Labour cabinet member for housing was welcomed. He had agreed to attend to give a talk on leasehold issues, followed by a question and answer session.

There was a change to the agenda and the talk by Councillor Diakides was moved up the agenda due to shortage of time. Councillor Harris had sent her apologies.

2. Talk by Councillor Isidorus Diakides, cabinet member for housing

Councillor Isidorus Diakides spoke on behalf of the council as a representative of all residents of the local authority. Councillor Diakides started by reporting that 25% of the social housing residents were leaseholders, mostly ex-tenants who bought under the Right To Buy (RTB) scheme. When the RTB was introduced in the UK it met with opposition from two different groups. Firstly, the opposition side of the government but also a group worried that the RTB would undermine social housing. He remarked that the current housing crisis was proving them correct; however, he felt it was legitimate to encourage people to own their own property.

Councillor Diakides remarked that the current legislation in regard to leaseholders was a mess and the government had been trying to address the problems since it was introduced but this had only made more problems. Some leaseholders had signed different leases so not everyone could be dealt with in the same way.

There was an array of problems and misunderstandings but the bottom line was that everyone had to keep going. He reported that Councils had a draconian duty to abide by the clauses in the leases but, within the framework of the lease, he had tried to adopt every legal measure to help people to pay bills and he did not want any leaseholder to have to pay over the odds. He advised that he was trying to keep people aware of what was going on with regard to the Council and housing and also what independent advice was made available. He remarked that he relied on residents, both tenant and leaseholder, to alert him when there were problems.

Councillor Diakides made reference to the court case brought by the Council against the leaseholders in 2004. He said that he regretted people were misled to believe they had a legal argument in this case.

He confirmed that, after the inspection by the Audit Commission, Homes for Haringey should be given a 2 star rating, meaning that they could access funds from central government to implement the Decent Homes scheme. With regard to the Decent Homes project, he advised that the majority of the work would be done to the inside of tenants' properties but work would be done on communal areas.

Councillor Diakides presented an open invitation to any person to find a precedent for reducing the costs of the refurbishment/upgrading works. If found, he asked to please let him know and he promised to adopt it in this case.

The question and answer part of the talk then commenced. Most questions concentrated on the payment options and time frame for the work. Leaseholders wanted to be more informed on what was happening to their homes. Other matters arising related to leaseholders having already done redecoration or to the replacement of windows and doors and the right for them to install these for their own property. Nick Martin-Clarke advised that, through recent talks with Homes for Haringey, they had agreed in principle that leaseholders would be able to vary their lease to allow them to take responsibility for windows and doors in their property.

3. Report on the past year for the HLA

HLA Chair, Nick Martin Clarke reported that the year had been very quiet up until March 2007 as it was still recovering from the shock of losing the court case two years previously and there had been a loss of morale.

As a result of the LVT hearing in March 2007, the HLA had strengthened its resolve, as the Decent Homes programme was a massive worry for every leaseholder in Haringey, as the ALMO would be spending more than £300million over the coming four years if it was awarded a 2 star rating by the Audit Commission, and it was felt that Haringey did not have a great track record of spending money effectively.

The LVT had awarded the ALMO a dispensation from consulting with leaseholders on the costs and planned works on the Decent Homes programme, when the HLA had wanted the ALMO to adopt the principles of full disclosure with regard to the upcoming works. The HLA felt the LVT hearing in March was unfair as the ALMO was represented by a Queen's Counsel and the HLA never got a chance to put their case. The cost of paying for the QC was £30,000 of leaseholder and tenants' money.

The HLA did gain one very strong advantage through the hearing; they were able to get access to a complete list of all leaseholders in the borough, which was something they had been trying to obtain for seven years. This led to a mail shot sent to every leaseholder property in the borough and thanks went to everyone who helped. There had been a General Meeting on 3 May that was attended by 66 people and 52 observations on the notices about the programme issued by the council had been gained. There had been over 250 responses to the questionnaire that was sent in the mail shot, with massive support for the three key demands that it was thought leaseholders wanted to make.

- The right to nominate alternative sub-contractors
- The right to vary the lease to allow leaseholders to install their own windows and doors
- The right to be represented on the core group where the constructor partners and senior ALMO officers meet.

A demonstration had been held on the steps of River Park House the day the Audit Commission arrived, which resulted in the HLA meeting with the Audit Commission and good coverage in the local press.

Thanks to that effort it was possible to report that some important gains in discussion at the top level with the ALMO had been achieved. The right to vary the lease had been gained (in principle). Residents were going to be represented on the core groups – although there would be a hard fight on this point, as was proved in the second HLA meeting with Jackie Thomas, the Executive Director of Homes for Haringey, when the HLA were left with the understanding that leaseholders specifically would be represented there. It also looked like the principle of maximum disclosure had basically been accepted.

So there was good news. Significant achievements had been made which everyone could be very proud of and it was possible to look back over the last six months and see the difference that a committed joint effort could make. The work was not finished; there was still a lot to do. It was important to build a team from the huge range of talents and abilities within the leaseholder community and become a force to be reckoned with.

Nick finished his report by advising the AGM that he would be standing down as Chair for the HLA but that he will still be an active member of the HLA, working in an outreach capacity to local leaseholders associations and to stay on as the press officer.

4. Financial Reports

A set of accounts had been distributed to members for the Haringey Leaseholder Association income and expenditure for the year to 31 March 2007. These were accepted.

5. Election of Officers and Committee Members

All the officers and Committee were thanked and formally retired from their positions.

Election of Chair

Nick stepped down from the platform and there was a nomination from the floor for Sue Brown to become the new Chair for the HLA. This was seconded. The majority present voted in favour. There were no votes against. Sue Brown was therefore duly elected as Chair of the HLA and took over the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

Election of Vice-Chair

Chukwuemeka Ekeowa was nominated for the new position of Vice Chair for the HLA; this was seconded. The majority present voted in favour. There were no votes against. Chukwuemeka Ekeowa was therefore duly elected as Vice Chair of the HLA.

Election of Secretary

Sarah Rooney was nominated as Secretary in a reduced role as many of the responsibilities of Secretary would be carried out by other Officers. This nomination was seconded. The majority present voted in favour. There were no votes against. Sarah Rooney was therefore duly elected as Secretary of the HLA.

Election of Treasurer

In his absence Selim Buyukdogan was nominated for the position of Treasurer for the HLA. This was seconded. The majority present voted in favour. There were no votes against. Selim Buyukdogan was therefore duly elected as Treasurer of the HLA.

Election of Committee members

Nick Martin-Clark, Anne Crellin, Dennis Ohea, Olyve Johnson and Russell Chater all agreed to stand. There were no further nominations. The majority of those present voted in favour of the nominated candidates. There were no votes against. It was agreed that other previous committee members not present would be asked if they wanted to continue and, if so, would be co-opted.

6. Approval of the new constitution

A draft copy of the HLA constitution was circulated to members for them to look at. Members were asked to pass any comments back to the committee. The constitution would then be finalised and ratified at a future general meeting.

7. The future of leaseholders – A talk from Councillor Catherine Harris, Lib Dem shadow member for housing

Unfortunately Councillor Harris was unable to attend the meeting.

8. Any other business

There being no other business the meeting came to an end.