

# HARINGEY LEASEHOLDERS ASSOCIATION

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD AT WOOD GREEN SOCIAL CLUB, STUART CRESCENT, WOOD GREEN, N22 5NJ ON SATURDAY 25 JUNE 2016

**Present:** Lloyd Grandson (Chair) (LG), Sue Brown (Vice-Chair) (SB), Nick Martin-Clark (Treasurer) (NMC), Peter Gilbert (Secretary) (PG) and a total of 39 other members of the Association

## 1 Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed members to the AGM and thanked them for attending. He added that it was hoped that the meeting would finish by 11.30. He then introduced the officers to the meeting.

## 2 Chair's Report

The Chair read his report for the year ended 31 March 2016. He said that it had been another very busy year. Yet again, Homes for Haringey (HfH) had continued to be as awkward as possible. In the past year, they had not only refused to recognise HLA but had decided to abolish all umbrella groups in the borough, so sheltered housing had lost their representative group as well. The Board had done this by deciding to completely abolish the Resident Involvement Agreement, the contract which they had agreed with residents and had signed in 2006. Apparently, HfH's promises and signatures meant nothing and could just be retracted whenever HfH felt like it.

He went on to say that all this had been done without HfH bothering to ask residents what they actually wanted. HfH said that they had carried out consultation, but they hadn't bothered to ask any of the important questions or genuinely listen to anything other than answers on minor issues. On the big points, HfH had consulted only themselves. The HLA was still fighting back against their arrogance and high-handedness; a direct quote from a High Court judge criticising the Chair of the HfH Board, by taking action to challenge the Board's decisions. This would be amplified later in the meeting.

The Chair added that, despite all the attempts by the Board to distract the HLA, it had still managed to help a lot of leaseholders with their own particular problems with HfH, especially the ongoing problems with Decent Homes work. Most recently, leaseholders along Lordship Lane had received bills for £35,000, just for windows. Of course HfH were not being reasonable about renegotiating this. The problems just kept on coming. One example of discrimination was that tenants were permitted to put in noisy flooring, even when it was very anti-social, whereas leaseholders were denied that permission. Another issue was the problem with refunds. For over three years, an elderly lady had been forced to wait for a refund of £3,000 on the grounds that the final bill had not been produced. It was OK for HfH to take money

on the basis of an estimate . they did this the whole time . but they had not been willing to refund on the basis of an estimate and leaseholders had suffered. There was also concern over the forthcoming demolitions in Love Lane, Northumberland Park and Broadwater Farm. Leaseholders had no guarantee of fair treatment as there was no published policy on what would happen afterwards and there was no transparency over HfH's deals with the developers. The way in which HLA was treated was part and parcel of how leaseholders were treated, which cost all leaseholders money from their own pockets in the end. Nor had HLA forgotten its commitment to fight for the rights of non-resident leaseholders, as well as legal rights for leaseholders in general.

The Chair continued that, despite the strong resistance of HfH, HLA had won some key points. In order to keep on and show HfH that residents would not tolerate overbearing behaviour on the part of people who were supposed to be public servants working for the good of residents, HLA desperately needed the support of leaseholders. Leaseholders could not win and defend their rights unless they stood together. One of the reasons that HfH were so eager to get rid of HLA was so that HfH could divide and conquer. The Chair urged leaseholders not to let HfH get rid of HLA, and said that the Committee would explain later in the meeting what leaseholders could do to help.

The Chair concluded by saying that, if the Association members all pulled together, by the next AGM the Committee hoped to be able to report success in winning back what HfH was trying to take away from HLA and to gain even more for HLA. The Association wanted respect for residents.

### **3 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Grace Lungu and Lincoln Grandson.

### **4 Minutes of the AGM held on 25 April 2015**

The minutes of the inquorate Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 25 April 2015 were tabled. The Vice-Chair explained that as that meeting had not been quorate the election of officers and Committee members, as well as a number of other items of business which had to be considered in a quorate meeting, had been deferred to the Special General Meeting held on 23 May 2015, whose minutes had been approved at the General Meeting held on 17 October 2015.

The minutes were approved by 14 votes to 0, with 7 abstentions. None of the other leaseholders present voted. One of those who abstained said that those leaseholders who had not attended the meeting on 25 April 2015 could not express a view on the accuracy of the minutes.

### **5 Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **6 Treasurer's Report**

The Treasurer presented the Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 March 2016, which was tabled at the meeting. He apologised for the fact that he had not also brought the income and expenditure account for the year.

The Treasurer said that it had been an expensive year for HLA. The Association had incurred expenditure on items such as letters sent to non-resident leaseholders, leafleting, telephone calls to encourage leaseholders to attend General Meetings, the Association's PO Box and email updates to leaseholders. This had been covered by the voluntary annual subscription of £20 per subscribing leaseholder and donations from Committee members. Because HLA was not recognised by HfH, it was unable to piggy-back notices of its meetings with communications from HfH to leaseholders. Nor did HfH supply HLA with details of new leaseholders who moved in to HfH-managed properties. It had been HLA's hope to achieve re-recognition and improved funding from HfH.

The Treasurer drew attention to the signatures on the balance sheet from him and the reporting accountant, Dipakkumar Shah of Nielsens. He added that the declaration at the bottom of the Balance Sheet should refer to the year ended 31 March 2016, not 2015.

The accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 were approved by 29 votes to 0, with no formal abstentions.

## **7 Appointment of Qualified Accountant to examine the Accounts**

The meeting approved the re-appointment of Dipakkumar Shah of Nielsens as a qualified accountant to examine HLA's accounts by 27 votes to 0, with no formal abstentions.

## **8 Election of Officers and Committee Members**

- **Chair**

Lloyd Grandson vacated the Chair, which was taken by Sue Brown, Vice-Chair. She called for nominations for Chair of Haringey Leaseholders Association.

Lloyd Grandson, proposed by Nick Martin-Clark, seconded by Peter Gilbert, was the only nominee as Chair, and was approved by 32 votes to 0, with no formal abstentions.

Nick Martin-Clark moved a vote of thanks to the Chair for all his hard work during the year. He added that the case of Grandson v Homes for Haringey had established the right of leaseholders as a group to seek a judicial review.

Lloyd Grandson resumed the Chair.

- **Vice-Chair**

Sue Brown was proposed by Nick Martin-Clark as Vice-Chair of Haringey Leaseholders Association, seconded by Peter Gilbert, and was the only nominee. She was approved by 32 votes to 0, with no formal abstentions.

- **Secretary**

Peter Gilbert said that he was willing to serve as Secretary for one more year. NMC commented that PG prepared very detailed minutes and was always careful and thorough in ensuring that the Association complied with its constitution and respected its own procedures. HfH should show similar respect for its procedures. Peter Gilbert was proposed as Secretary by Sue Brown, seconded by Nick Martin-Clark, and was the only nominee. He was elected by 36 votes to 0, with no formal abstentions.

- **Treasurer**

NMC commented that HfH tended to say that HLA was run by only a few people. If there was a large Committee, many of whom attended Committee meetings, that would counter that view. Nick Martin-Clark was proposed as Treasurer by Sue Brown, seconded by Yvonne Campbell, and was the only nominee. He was elected by 37 votes to 0, with no formal abstentions. SB congratulated NMC on the huge amount of work he did for HLA, including work on its legal cases, writing the newsletter and maintaining the website. She said that the Association would be unable to function without him.

- **Committee Members**

NMC explained that meetings of the HLA Committee were held every month or two at Wood Green Social Club, normally on a Wednesday evening. They lasted about a couple of hours. Committee members were asked to keep data confidential. He added that it was a very interesting time: HLA and HfH would be entering into mediation and the Committee would need to consider how HLA should approach the process and what it should request from HfH. Beneath the surface, HfH was rattled. Two Company Secretaries and the senior Resident Involvement Officer had resigned. In view of the degree of pressure under which HfH was operating, HLA hoped to be able to negotiate more successfully with the ALMO.

Existing Committee members Michael Blasebalk, Yvonne Campbell and Clare Richards, and new volunteers Regina Aide Arionget, Shiovaun Cullen, Sophie Elvey, Odeshea Gordon, Mary Monbelly, Innocent Okoli, Michael Olulode and Joya Roy put themselves forward to serve on the Committee and were approved unanimously en bloc.

## **9 Report on decision by HfH Board to cease to recognise umbrella groups and HLA response**

NMC said that the HfH Board had de-recognised HLA in October 2014. HLA had been trying to regain recognition, but relationships with HfH had broken down. HLA had not been discouraged and was issuing proceedings for another judicial review as HfH had got rid of the structure for supporting umbrella groups. If HLA was excluded from recognition, its collective voice would be worth no more than that of individual leaseholders, and HLA might as well not exist. HfH should have some respect for HLA's efforts, for the support which HLA received, and for the fact that the service which HfH gave was inadequate. HLA received a large number of complaints against HfH from individual leaseholders about a large variety of issues. Its work was very important as issues involving people's homes could be very expensive. One example of what was wrong was that a leaseholder was issued with a summons to court and, five minutes before the action was due to begin, HfH's barrister came across to negotiate with the leaseholder.

NMC commented that it was unfair for leaseholders to be backed up against the wall so that they had to take the risk of going to court. For every one who did so, another 10 gave up and paid the money which HfH demanded. The attitude of HfH was to be mean to leaseholders, to control and intimidate leaseholders and to see them as a cash cow. Nobody on the HfH Board cared about leaseholders. The Decent Homes programme cost £200 million and leaseholders had paid £40 million towards this.

NMC asked the meeting who trusted HfH to get value for money from its contractors. No hands went up. He asked who thought the money could be better spent. Many hands went up.

NMC continued by saying that HLA was the only group that was sticking up for what was right. In spite of the councillors on the HfH Board, the independent people on the Board, whose job was to protect residents, and the residents on the Board, one leaseholder and three or four tenants, he did not feel protected by the Board. indeed, his whole existence was under threat. The Board's promise of resident involvement had failed. The Resident Scrutiny Panel had failed as, when the Board had alleged that SB and the HLA were mispending public money, the RSP had not investigated the complaint properly but had simply got rid of SB, although the RSP was supposed to be an independent body.

SB said that HLA had arranged for a forensic accountant to look at HLA's accounts. He had found nothing wrong and had cleared HLA of all the accusations that had been made.

Mr Okoli asked what HLA was going to do to challenge HfH. He said that HfH had arranged for work to be done to seven windows in a one-bedroom flat and had accepted a quotation of £30,000 for the cost. Initially, his mortgage lender had not

been able to help, and he had needed to contact his MP and his councillor, the latter of whom had written to the mortgage lender. It had taken four months to resolve that correspondence. Mr Okoli concluded by saying that if a leaseholder had proof of what he or she was going through, the courts should give the leaseholder the right to challenge HfH.

Ms Gordon asked what HfH was going to do to publicise more widely what HfH was doing and to stop HfH ~~telling lies~~.

The Chair said that, although HfH had said that it was trying to engage better with residents, HfH had never asked leaseholders whether they wanted HLA to be re-recognised. He recalled that more than 80 leaseholders had attended the SGM in May 2015. When HLA had taken HfH to court, the judge had said that the Chair of the HfH Board had been arrogant and high-handed. The HLA Committee had spoken to Haringey Council officers and had agreed with their proposal that there should be mediation between HfH and HLA. HfH had agreed to mediation, but with pre-conditions. The Chair commented that this was not a fair way for mediation to be conducted.

The Chair added that HLA would keep fighting and would try to retrieve the grant which HfH had made while HLA had been recognised. HLA was fed up, but wanted to negotiate with HfH to improve conditions and to obtain a fair deal for leaseholders. He cited his own case as an example of why leaseholders should challenge HfH. HfH had said that works had to be carried out to his leasehold property on the Love Lane estate at a cost of £25,000. He had eventually taken HfH to court. The judge had said that HfH had made ~~genuine mistakes~~ and that he would have to pay the bill, including four years interest of £11,000. He had waited for a total of six weeks before he had received an invoice for interest, which included that six-week period. The Chair had paid one instalment of interest and HfH had not chased him for the balance for a period of four years.

In answer to a question from the Chair, NMC explained that as HLA was an unincorporated association the financial risk of any court action fell on those leaseholders whose names were entered as parties to the action. The total cost of their abortive application for a judicial review had been £56,000.

The Chair continued that HLA or individual leaseholders had to have concrete evidence if they went to court. When HfH had taken him to court, he had not liked the attitude which they had shown.

NMC said that one of the reasons why going to court was expensive was that HLA had good solicitors, whom HLA had supplied with a lot of evidence. The solicitors had advised that HLA had a very strong case for a judicial review.

Ms Elvey commented that her case had taken just over a year to complete. HfH had not wanted to listen. HfH's attitude had been that they had made a decision and that

was that. She had been shocked that they had gone to the Crown Court with very little evidence. The case had been adjourned and the Crown Court had referred it for a hearing to the Old Bailey. Just before the hearing was due to take place, HfH had sought leave to withdraw the case.

The AGM was asked whether HLA (subject to the result of mediation) should seek a judicial review of the HfH Board's decision to cease recognising umbrella groups, and agreed to go ahead by 36 votes to 0, with no formal abstentions.

A female leaseholder asked whether the cases which individual leaseholders had described could be combined into a single package. NMC commented that this could not be done immediately. It might be possible to consider doing so at some stage, but not when HLA was seeking a judicial review.

NMC asked leaseholders who had cases under review to come to see the Committee if they wanted help in following up their cases.

## **10 Citizens against arrogance and standing up to high-handedness in Haringey (CAASHH)**

### **11 HfH Board Meeting Tuesday 28 June 2016**

NMC asked for volunteers to take part in a demo outside HfH's office at 48 Station Road, N22, for 6.30 pm on Tuesday 28 June in advance of the HfH Board meeting at 7pm. At the previous Board meeting on 10 May, he had spoken to the Board Chair, who had indicated that he might write to the Press and might talk to residents about their grievances. However, apart from the Chair mentioning that HfH might be open to mediation, nothing had yet been done.

Tan Ahmet, Sue Brown, Shiovaun Cullen, Mary Monbelly, Clare Richards and Joya Roy volunteered to take part.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 11.45am.