

HARINGEY LEASEHOLDERS ASSOCIATION

MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT 92 GLOUCESTER ROAD,
N17, ON TUESDAY 3 APRIL 2012

Present

Sue Brown (Chair) (SB), Nick Martin-Clark (Treasurer) (NMC), Peter Gilbert (Secretary) (PG), Rita Batzias (Committee Member) (RB), Anne Gibson (Committee Member) (AG), Kate Worley (Committee Member) (KW) and, for part of the meeting, Mr Ahmad, a resident leaseholder.

Welcome

The Chair welcomed new members to their first meeting of the Committee.

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Delsie Grandson.

Jackie Thomas

The Chair said that Jackie Thomas, the Executive Director for Housing, had recently left Homes for Haringey (HfH). It had been a bolt from the blue and HfH had not yet given details of any consequent organisational change. She added that HLA would not want to deal with Joe Boake of the Resident Involvement Team, who had been the source of all HLA's troubles over the past couple of years.

History between HfH and HLA

The Chair outlined by way of a brief explanation the background to the unconstitutional withdrawal by the HfH Board of recognition from HLA in December 2010 and the subsequent refusal by the Chief Executive to read the evidence in her complaint on behalf of HLA. HLA had since appealed to the Local Government Commissioner, who had appointed an investigating officer with a history of backing HfH in her decisions on all complaints that had been made to the LGC against HfH. KW said that it was LGO practice for the same investigating officer to look into complaints against a particular body. SB said that the investigating officer had ignored half the evidence incorporated in the appeal.

The Chair went on to say that in February 2011 HfH had supported the Haringey Leaseholders Campaign Group (HLCG) by funding a separate mailout costing some £1700 advertising HLCG's inaugural meeting, which had taken place in a room at the Civic Centre. The meeting had considered HLCG's proposed constitution and nominations to HLCG's Executive Committee, one of whom should have been barred from appointment as she was the leaseholder member of the HfH Board.

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(Mr Ahmad joined the meeting at this point. NMC said that he had rung to give his apologies for HLA's recent AGM and that he had since been notified of the Committee meeting.)

The Chair went on to say that, according to the HLCG website, nominations to the Committee could be made at any time before the meeting. Nominations for herself, NM and PG had been sent to the HLCG e-mail address 4 hours before the meeting. However, when she, NMC and PG had arrived just before the meeting was due to start they had been told, despite following the rules, that no more nominations could be made as HLCG had already printed up the nomination forms. In addition to that undemocratic action, the Chair of the meeting had refused to accept any discussion on the constitution and the meeting had been asked to vote to accept the constitution without being allowed to raise any points in it. According to the HLCG website, there were now only three members of the Committee (including the leaseholder member of the HfH Board) which rendered it inquorate. HfH had not replied to HLA's enquiry whether the Board member had declared an interest, and although HLA had tried to ask her direct she had not responded.

Despite having been informed that the HLA would be applying for recognition, HfH had consulted leaseholders on HLCG's application for recognition by HfH alone and had received 224 votes in response, with a majority of 199 to 25 in favour. This meant that when HLA had also applied for recognition, this consultation had been rendered redundant and a waste of money as HfH would have to consult leaseholders again on which of the two applications to approve. Asked by KW how she thought the matter should be resolved, the chair replied that a petition for a Special General Meeting had been ignored by HLCG and that, when HfH had been informed, they had brushed the matter aside. HLA had been going to take HLCG to court, but HLCG had withdrawn its request for recognition. HLA had submitted an application for recognition but, although Committee members had met HfH senior management in summer 2011, the meeting had not been satisfactory as HfH had insisted that the meeting was to talk only about HLA's constitution and nothing else. David Sherrington had attended as an observer. Rowan Limond, HfH Director of Finance and the Company Secretary for HfH, had also been present. KW said that, depending on its exact remit, HfH could be an Industrial and Provident Society. It was important to know the sort of company HfH was and its remit. Under the Freedom of Information Act, HLA could ask HfH to explain why the roles of individual Directors were changing and who was responsible for what.

NMC said that Ms Limond had been involved in discussions on the constitution. It was not clear who HLA was dealing with and what their responsibilities were. Mr Sherrington had been at the meeting between HLA and HfH senior managers as an observer, but Ms Thomas had apparently since handed her role over to him.

The Chair said that HLA had been making checks under the FoI Act concerning HfH's expenditure on the HLCG. HLA would put its findings on its website and she

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had said to Ms Thomas that HLA wanted to discuss the issues with her, but Ms Thomas had refused to do so. KW suggested that HLA Committee members might want to cover HfH Board meetings on a rota. SB said that HfH was now blocking Fol requests. NMC added that HLA was being kept completely in the dark. KW said that HfH officers knew that they could filibuster. NMC said that HLA had been told that it must make a number of constitutional changes and that otherwise it would not be recognised.

KW commented that the HfH Board was responsible for its officers. The Chair said that HfH had done nothing about the appeal against the de-recognition that HLA had submitted. None of the HfH Board members wanted to sit on the panel which was due to consider it. She had said that HLA would be willing to discuss the matter with HfH and withdraw the appeal against de-recognition if HfH withdrew some of the statements it had made against the HLA.

Mr Ahmad asked whether HLA had considered approaching Haringey councillors. KW said that five councillors were members of the HfH Board. If HfH officers were blocking HLA's requests to the Board, HLA might want to lobby individual Board members. The Chair said that when HLA had been de-recognised on 1 December 2010 NMC had rung a number of councillors. KW said that some councillors preferred to be lobbied face to face at their surgeries. She asked whether there was no-one in the HfH structure whom HLA could trust. The Chair commented that while HLA was trying to build goodwill, HfH seemed to be playing games.

Action arising from AGM

The Chair suggested that HLA might wish to take no further action on its appeal for the time being and to prepare a new application for recognition by HfH. KW commented that, in the same way as Homes for Islington had been wound up, Homes for Haringey might cease to exist. She asked whether it would be worthwhile to await the report of the Local Government Ombudsman on HLA's appeal, and also to see whether a new organisational framework was created for HfH.

The Chair said that, according to the criteria for recognition, HLA needed to submit an application to HfH within two months of the AGM. Also according to the criteria, HLA was obliged to invite HfH to its AGM. She wanted to arrange a meeting with David Sherrington to discuss governance issues. The amendments to the constitution that the HLA Committee supported had been adopted by the AGM: all the other proposed amendments had been defeated. The discussion was on record in the AGM minutes. The Chair asked the Committee whether the minutes of the AGM could be placed on the website as they stood and whether she could forward them to David Sherrington.

NMC and the Chair explained that, apart from HfH's completely unacceptable suggestion that the Treasurer's signature had to appear on every cheque, the rest of

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their proposals were merely nuances of opinion or matters that had so far not arisen and were hence hypothetical.

In answer to Mr Ahmad's suggestion that HLA should lobby councillors face to face, KW explained that as HfH was a separate organisation from the London Borough of Haringey (LBH) it would be more sensible to approach the councillors whom LBH nominated to the Board of HfH. NMC said that he had invited a LBH councillor to the AGM in the hope that we could influence his opinion.

(NMC agreed to let Mr Ahmad know about the next Committee meeting and Mr Ahmad then left.)

The Committee unanimously agreed that the minutes of the AGM and a summary of the speakers' sessions should be placed on the website.

New Application for Recognition

The Chair outlined the information that had to accompany the application from an umbrella group to HfH for recognition and funding, which must be submitted within two months of the umbrella group's AGM.

It was noted that owing to pressure of time NMC had been unable to get the draft annual accounts checked in time for the AGM. It was agreed that he should ask Neilsons to check them and that meanwhile the Chair should advise HfH that checked accounts would follow.

In the course of discussion, it was noted that the AGM should have been asked to vote on whether the HLA Committee should be permitted to adapt the Code of Conduct as necessary, subject to adoption by the subsequent GM.

KW pointed out that a number of estates already had resident groups. NMC said that it would be useful to see if HLA could link to such groups as well as being a borough-wide organisation.

The Committee agreed that the Chair should compile the papers that were available and forward them with the completed application form to David Sherrington with a request for information as to the next steps towards HfH granting recognition to HLA and when this was likely to take place.

Legal Action

NMC advised the Committee that he had seen Riz Majid of Neumanns, HLA's solicitors, that morning. Mr Majid had advised that, in view of the Local Government Ombudsman's wide discretionary powers, HLA would not persuade a Court to overturn the LGO's decision, and that therefore HLA should not seek judicial review of that decision.

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Press Release

NMC said that HLA had a good working relationship with the Journal and further to the AGM had recently issued a Press release which also took note of Jackie Thomas's resignation.

Next Meeting

KW offered to host the next meeting, at a date to be arranged.

There being no further business, the meeting closed with a vote of thanks to the Chair.