

## **Haringey Leaseholders' Association Committee Meeting Meeting held on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2010 at the Civic Centre, Wood Green**

In attendance

### **Committee:**

Sue Brown (Chair) (SBr)  
Rita Batzias (RB)  
XXXX (Treasurer)  
Nick Martin-Clark (NMC)  
Delsie Grandson (DG)  
Scott Russell (SR)

### **Leaseholders:**

Alena Breckova

The meeting was opened by Sue Brown at 19:00

XXXX objected to the meeting being recorded. SB explained that it was only because there was no-one to take minutes. A vote was taken (3 to 1 in favour) and the recording went ahead.

Item 1: Recognition by HfH and RIA

SB said that RIA was important because it governed relationship between HfH and HLA. SB said she had been on working-group rewriting RIA. SB said that HLA had objected to first version because of lack of proper consultation. SB explained that our recognition was also covered by the RIA and that it was on an annual basis. There is a form to fill in each year. SB said she would read out some sections of the RIA that explained what our recognition was conditional on. Without recognition the RIA says that associations will not be able to take part in decision-making.

SB read out a section that explains how recognition in this context is different from section 29 recognition under the Landlord & Tenant Act 1985 which covers section 20 consultation. RB asked if we had applied for this other recognition. SB explained that it had been brought up but that we hadn't applied for it.

XXXX said that in the RIA there was a part of it dealing with umbrella groups which said that an umbrella group could be in fact for single, individual, leaseholders rather than groups. LZ said she was aware that the groups were mentioned in our constitution. SB said that would be dealt with separately.

SB quoted the RIA as saying that there must be 4 quorate meetings a year, with proper minutes. The committee and general meetings must be constitutionally held. There must be a proper quorate AGM to which the RI team must be invited. Equal opportunities had to be respected.

SR asked how many leaseholders there were. SB replied about 4,000 given the fact that some leaseholders had more than one property, including housing associations. SR said he had no trust in HfH and questioned the right of HfH to dictate conditions to residents' associations given their own chaotic structure. SB said that the RIA had been drawn up in consultation with residents through panels. SR said the panels were useless and that you got nowhere. SB said that you could get somewhere with persistence. SR said that HLA was set up and structured so that personal matters could be dealt with properly by the group in a way which the panels excluded. SR acknowledged that SB had had some successes on panels. SB asked what we were here for if we weren't recognised. SR replied that we were here to gather as a group of leaseholders whether or not we were recognised. DG said that it would be counter-productive to see the council as enemies. SR said that he battled away doggedly as

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an individual leaseholder and wouldn't let go. SB said that ten leaseholders would be listened to when one could be ignored.

SB continued to read out a bit of the RIA dealing with meeting standards where it said that the minutes should be agreed by the secretary or minute-taker with the Chair. There were also provisions about standards of conduct where it was said that there was an expectation that people would behave acceptably at meetings and when representing their group. The existence of codes of conduct for panels was mentioned. There was a presumption that all groups would have a code of conduct in place to be referred to for every meeting. The Chair is to agree the minutes before they are sent out and to draft an agenda for the next meeting.

SR said that the rules were too restrictive and were a way of nailing down organisations. DG said we needed HfH. SR said they needed us. RB said we all need each other. SR said we pay their wages. SB said that if HfH wanted to ignore us they could. XXXX said that she had not read all the document but that the way the panels were run was quite democratic. XXXX said the question was whether the HLA at the present time was in compliance with the RIA. She said that the RIA made it clear that groups were to be run for their members. XXXX asked for more time to go through the RIA herself.

NMC pointed out that we obtained unconditional recognition only last year. SB said that the recognition process for umbrella groups was relatively new and that Simon Godfrey had hung the threat of de-recognition over the HLA because he wanted an update to the constitution. NMC said that we had gone through that process of updating the constitution and managed to do so in the way that suited us not HfH. We had thus won that argument. NMC said it would be a shame if we failed to get recognition this year because we needed to be consistent if we were to seriously ask for a substantial increase in our grant such as had been proposed by HFH. SB said that officially recognition ran out on 31/3. NMC asked if officers had to sign the application form. SB said yes and that XXXX had signed last year's one. XXXXX said that she wanted it to be clear that she had signed for that one year. XXXX said she had a letter for SB. SB said she had seen it only that afternoon and had not had time to respond to it. NMC asked if we were going to be able to put in our recognition application form. SB said she didn't know. NMC asked XXXX if she would sign the application form so that the HLA could get recognition. There was no answer. SB said it might be best to go through the form first.

AB said that she did not think the HLA represented the interests of leaseholders and that it shouldn't be recognised. SB thanked her for her contribution.

XXXX said that she didn't want to be cornered and had received the RIA only the day before. She asked for more time. She said there was no agenda to what she was saying.

SB read out some questions on the form: 'Committee encourages involvement by.....?' SB said that setting up local groups was part of her answer to that question. AB laughed. NMC asked what was funny. AB replied that it was ridiculous to say that the HLA encouraged leaseholders to attend meetings and then, when they wanted to say something, they couldn't. XXXX said that most of the committee had resigned and that things needed addressing. SB asked to stick to recognition for now. Another question was 'The committee would like to encourage wider involvement by...?' SB explained that setting up local groups was part of that because it was difficult to communicate with 4,000 leaseholders individually. XXXX said that the phone and the internet could be used and that a steady committee was important as well as a newsletter. SB asked how a newsletter was to be distributed to 4,000 leaseholders. XXXX said there were many ways but that a stable committee that was not about one person was needed. SB said that didn't answer the question. SB explained how hard it was to do a mail-out to everyone. Local groups were an answer to that question especially as not all leaseholders had email, particularly the elderly.

SB said that she had been encouraging local groups for many years and that the HLA was there to help people help themselves, possibly with some money for, say, hiring a room. AB asked what money there was and if there was enough for say 30 groups. She said it would go on the service charge. NMC said that it would come from the subscriptions because that was the money we had. AB questioned whether the HLA had anything to offer local groups. AB asked how many groups had been created. SB replied that none had been because the HLA had never had time to get round to it. Outreach had been consistently on the agenda but there had been too much other business. NMC said that the HLA could

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not deal centrally with all the problems on individual estates but that its role was to put leaseholders in touch with one another which it now could do thanks to its database. SB said the HLA could also act as a bridge, helping co-ordination. XXXX said that you couldn't give out names because of the DPA and that often the problem was getting in touch with landlord leaseholders on behalf of others. XXXX said there was much apathy.

XXXX said that the Ferry Lane exercise had been supposed to be a membership-exercise to go and meet people, get to know them and get contact details, promoting the HLA. It would then be possible to find the drivers and encourage them. That would have been under constitutional objective 3 a). SB said that that would have meant we had to contact 260 people whereas that is something that FLAG could do. Then the HLA just needs to give a newsletter or some information to one contact, FLAG, instead of 260. LZ said she had brought in the database on disk, the current one, and she gave it to SB. NMC asked if that included the emails. XXXX said it was all on there and that there were no separate lists. XXXXX said that if they had been allowed to do what they had been proposing the database would contain a further 200 email addresses, enabling easy communication. The proposed door-knocking was to have been done outside FLAG but without overstepping them. SB said the door-knocking should have been discussed. XXXX said that was what they had wanted on 4<sup>th</sup> of December. NMC said nobody was stopping the discussion. AB and XXXX said that NMC had been stopping them. NMC said that was not true.

DG asked what was happening with the mail-outs included in HomeZone. SB replied that we were not independent and had to rely on HfH who censored our communication. In fact the lead member for housing had written some of our letters!

XXXX said that Catrina had prepared a newsletter and that her time and that of others had not been sufficiently appreciated and that the Ferry Lane door-knocking had been an opportunity wasted. SB said that she had not opposed the door-knocking but said that a local leaseholder group within FLAG should have been promoted at the same time.

SB asked how we send out a newsletter to 4,000 leaseholder saying what we want to say without interference if we don't have local groups to help distribute it. SB said email was not adequate. XXXX said that an email with a newsletter doesn't cost anything to print and can be sent quickly and resent. SB said at least 50% of leaseholders don't have email. XXXX agreed that at some point a printed version would be needed. SR said that newsletters could be printed off and distributed. NMC said that funds could not be given to individual leaseholders but only properly constituted groups. SR said 'Forget about money' NMC asked what XXXX's objection had been to including the question 'How about setting up your own group?' as part of the door-knocking exercise. XXXX said that comes much later and you can't start with that. XXXX said that we couldn't do that without getting approval from FLAG and that there had been no email or anything giving such approval. NMC said the HLA thought they had at the time, and still thought they had, approval through Piers who was a member of FLAG and had spoken to them about the door-knocking. XXXX said that it could be called a misunderstanding and that with a group like FLAG it is important to have them on board before-hand. NMC asked if Piers was not on FLAG. XXXX said that he had not attended many meetings and that although he had had an email it had been several months before. XXXX said it would have crossed FLAG to include that question and that FLAG were very powerful and active. XXXX said it was protocol. SB said that that was not what PJ had given the committee to understand. SB said that shortly after PJ came on the committee it had been discussed with him and that her understanding was that PJ had then taken it back to FLAG and then came back to us, saying that FLAG were interested. NMC said that PJ had asked for the leaseholder addresses on Ferry Lane. LZ said that this was right but that PJ had never had an acquiescence or agreement that he was to do this. NMC asked if there was anything in the FLAG minutes about PJ having raised this. XXXX said there wasn't. XXXX said the misunderstanding was that this was thought to have been at an advanced stage when in fact it was at an initial stage. SB said her point was that you don't want to knock on 240 doors twice. XXXX said it wouldn't have had to be done twice. The point was to find active members and then work with them. SB said that she understood PJ had spoken to FLAG about it and that knocking on doors on an estate where there is an established association trying to get people to join your association without mentioning theirs would be a sure way to step on their toes. XXXX said that was exactly where they were coming from and something they didn't want to do, they wanted to have representation there first. XXXX said that on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December she had said that we needed to have a delegation in there first

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of one or two of us. SB said that she understood that PJ was the FLAG representative. NMC said that PJ should be the one to answer this sort of question. NMC said that if we wanted to know if PJ had spoken to FLAG we should ask him. XXXX said that on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December she had asked him what we were going to do on Ferry Lane and he had said it was a membership exercise that could develop into other things with FLAG or separately. NMC said PJ had had no objection to setting up a local leaseholder group. XXXX said the point was with FLAG you needed to have a formal delegation, a formal letter, giving their agreement. XXXX said that it was not a difficult point that you couldn't door-knock on behalf of another association without their agreement. SB said that she believed that she had put something about FLAG on the previous year's application form as a result of what PJ had told her.

AB said this showed poor communication in the committee. AB said that she perceived a strong committee as one in which every member, every member Rita OK, actually co-operates and does something

SR suggested that a newsletter be sent to everyone with email. SB said it was not adequate. NMC said it would be a start. NMC said that nothing in all the discussions they were having was of enough significance for the HLA to self-destruct over which was unfortunately what had happened. NMC said to XXXX that he was pleased she had turned up. XXXX asked 'Really?' NMC said yes because maybe now the HLA could move on. NMC said that he regretted the difficult time everyone had had and that he had tried to build a vibrant strong organisation with lots of people contributing and had been disappointed when it went wrong. XXXX said that last December had completely buckled the HLA. XXXX said 'You two have to be more democratic I can't say it any other way. You are dealing with people. They are your livestock here. That then goes to create more life and promote your name.' SB said that a pyramid has to have a head and the head has to know what is going on. XXXX said she didn't agree with the code of conduct because it was completely autocratic.

AB said the head should not feel threatened by anybody or anything because everyone was contributing freely. She said there should be no personality problems but that they had been enormous. 'The head has to understand and to lead the wonderful personalities because there are people who are leaders in life, there are people who are not doers, people who just sit here and come and sleep.' [Rita had got tired and closed her eyes by this point.] SB said 'No personal remarks please'

NMC said we can't have anarchy. XXXX said they didn't want anarchy and that everyone had got on as a team that she had got involved in the HLA because of NMC. NMC said he was flattered and thanked her. There was laughter.

RB asked whether notices could be put up on estate boards informing people of the HLA's existence. SR agreed.

XXXX went back to the part of the RIA agreement that says umbrella groups can be just for single leaseholders. XXXX said you could work on a 'wholesale' basis going to just one individual leaseholder in a block. SB said that was what she was suggesting. XXXX said that no, SB was suggesting they set up formal groups. SB said they didn't have to be formal. NMC said it was a minimal bit of formality, a couple of bits of paper. SB said they didn't have to have any more formality than they wanted to and that it was up to each group, the whole point being to get people to work together. XXXX said that had been her aim.

NMC said that a big part of the problem was that outreach officers had not done very much, including him when it was his responsibility. He had been swamped with other stuff and outreach had always been at the bottom of the agenda.

DG talked about Northumberland Park and Rupert Marsh and the slump that followed losing the court case. The database came up. NMC said he had personally entered every single name into the database. AB said that she appreciated the time NMC had devoted to the HLA and would not have liked her character to have been publicly questioned in the way his had been. NMC thanked her for that. AB said that things evolve and new people come along with new ideas and they have to be accepted. SB said that everything that went before could not be dismissed. AB said 'It's on the record how can you dismiss it for Christ's sake?'

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XXXX said that the influx of new energy had been important and that it had been great. SB said it was important to try and avoid a slump such as had happened before and to learn from experience. NMC said he had been delighted when new people came along and had been pleased when AB came along. NMC said she had much to contribute and that there was a lot of talent on the committee. NMC said they got unlucky because there were a lot of confident, articulate, people and getting the blend between old and new was not easy. AB said that not enough time had been spent getting to know new members when they joined, for instance Ian Lush. NMC said he would have liked to spend more time with Ian Lush but with his mother's illness it had been difficult. SB said that between the election of the committee in October and the big row in December there hadn't been much time for people to get to know each other.

XXXX said that there should be rotations amongst officers on the committee, including the Chair. SB said that was fine if you could find people to do it. AB said that she had lots of experience she wanted to share and that she wanted nothing in return but that she had been discouraged and didn't want to waste her time. DG said "This is from me Alena and nobody knows what I'm going to ask, would you like to come back with us Alena?" AB said no. XXXX asked why DG had asked that. DG said it was because AB was there. AB said she had come to support XXXX because she had seen what she had been through and wanted to help her be at the meeting. XXXX asked whether a committee with a rotation of posts could be considered. SB said that under the constitution the officers have to stay in place until the next AGM.

NMC said that historically the difficulty had been finding people to do things and that was why he had accumulated several functions and signatures. Simply no-one else had been there at the time willing to do it. XXXX said the limited company needed three directors and that the trust had gone. NMC said that talking frankly about trust he felt that they had been to hell and back and that it had been very tough, and very tough for Sue who had been ill, and that they were prepared to stick it out until the bitter end because the structure of the HLA mattered. If the HLA didn't have procedure and respect that procedure the HLA would end up being undemocratic and that those democratic values were what had been preserved and saved even though it was at the expense of a lot of energy and enthusiasm. He asked that the newcomers also adjust a bit and work with the Chair and the existing structures of the HLA saying that it did not cost them much to do so. "Why can't you say: 'Let's communicate with her if we want to have a meeting?'" he asked. "Why can't you say: 'Let's help Sue out if she's got a problem? Let's not try and bypass her.'" He said that was a severe thing to have done. XXXX and AB said that that was definitely not what happened. NMC said that was why there had been problems. XXXX said respect goes both ways. "You expect respect, you expect adoration" she said. SB said she didn't want adoration. XXXX said she didn't know what SB wanted. SB said she wanted a well-running HLA. AB said that she was not going to come to meetings again and that this was the last time but that she wanted to say that the HLA needed to get pro bono legal advice about the grant increase especially as there was the important case of Ms Kaya going through the system at the moment.

There was a discussion about that case and XXXX agreed that the HLA needed to seek legal advice about how it affected the grant situation. SR said he would miss AB and thanked her for her contribution.

SB came back to the RIA and asked how the application form was to be filled out if not with reference to local groups. If other people had suggestions she said she would be willing to consider them.

Item 2 : Letter of 3<sup>rd</sup> of December about the grant

SR asked how come so much money was spent on the Leasehold Panel and why the HLA got so little. SB said that was why the grant offer was important. XXXX said that it would be an appalling shame if the HLA pushed for funding through the service charge while Ms Kaya's case had yet to be determined.

SB said that the HLA was still not in a position to respond to the letter. AB said that legal advice was needed. SB said that a general meeting might be needed. XXXX asked if we could get some independent legal advice on putting the grant through the service charge and if there was some other

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way of putting it through. Could we ask the question to a pro bono solicitor? Maybe Alena could help.

The meeting was brought to a close because it was 9pm.