

HARINGEY LEASEHOLDERS' ASSOCIATION

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING HELD AT HARINGEY CIVIC CENTRE, WOOD GREEN, N22 ON SATURDAY 26 OCTOBER 2013

Present: Sue Brown (Chair) [SB], Nick Martin-Clark (Secretary) [NMC], Anne Gibson (Treasurer) [AG] and a total of 20 other members of the Association, Richard Wilson (Lib Dem leader Haringey) [RW]

1 Opening Remarks and Chair's Report

- a) Recognition had been achieved again this year despite a stumble at the last minute which Astrid Kjellberg-Obst, HfH's Director of Operations, had sorted out. The HLA had a good relationship with her and regular meetings. The focus was on repairs, poor billing, people being charged twice. The HLA had asked for better repairs recording. The HLA had set up a new Service Charge Sub Committee . thanks to Lukie Hewat . where repairs was the main concern. Thanks to to Phil Hetteriarchi for all his hard work on the database.
- b) SB said there were interesting developments on the items listed in the agenda to do with the HLA's office, the campaign in favour of subletters and the CESP, that would be explained in due course.
- c) SB said that there was presently a consultation with leaseholders taking place over the proposed cap to major works bills to protect against unreasonable charges. The HLA would be responding and a standard letter would go up on the website.
- d) SB paid tribute to the memory of Delsie Grandson, a former long-standing committee member who had recently passed away after a long illness. Her funeral had been earlier that week and both the Chair and the Secretary had attended in recognition of the vital contribution Delsie had made to the Association. The Chair had left some flowers on behalf of the Association. The funeral had been very well attended by as many as 250 people. Without Delsie the HLA would not currently exist. She had stood by leaseholders through the difficult times because of her strong sense of what was fair and right. This had been mentioned at the funeral. Delsie had often been at the signing-in desk at general meetings. She was a lovely person who will be much missed. She left four sons some of whom used to come along to committee meetings in order to make sure that their mother got home safely. One son was present at the meeting. SB expressed the meeting's condolences to him. SB said that Delsie would have been pleased that the Association was doing so well. Thank you very much Delsie
- e) The minutes of the GM of 15/12/12 were agreed for accuracy by those present.

2 The HLA Office

NMC provided members with an update on the HLA's attempts to re-open an office. There was good news on this front. The HLA had had an office a long time ago which had cost £95,000 a year to run. It had been very popular, serving about 600 individual leaseholders over two years, but it was expensive and the HLA no longer had that kind of money. The HLA was attempting to do a lot with a little by enlisting the help of HfH. It had taken a long time to persuade HfH but they were now offering office space within an HfH facility in Commerce Rd. The idea was to open all day on Fridays. It might also later be possible to open on Saturdays for some of the day. This depended on whether HfH ended up opening themselves on Saturdays. The HLA would need two people in the office at any one time. There had been doubts about whether there would be enough privacy and reliability but the most recent meeting with A K-O of HfH earlier in the week had allayed many fears. It was hoped that the office could be operational shortly, possibly in as little as two weeks' time. AG said that the committee had not been adequately informed of these plans and that protocols still needed to be agreed. RB said that her main reason for joining the HLA had been to get the office re-opened.

3 Subletters campaign

NMC provided members with an update on the campaign to get subletters their vote back. The HLA had carried out a mail-shot to all the subletters on its mailing list and 118 signatures on a petition had been returned. These had been presented to HfH during a demo outside the board meeting on September 30th. A K-O had come to speak to the demonstrators and promised that the HLA would be included in face-to-face meetings as part of a planned review of governance by HfH.

In response to a question about how subletters were identified SB said that the HLA used correspondence addresses from its database. The database was now outdated and the HLA was seeking an up-to-date version from HfH. SB was going to write to the Information Commissioner to ask for guidance on the legality of this.

NMC asked the meeting to discuss the possibility of offering a compromise on the voting issue whereby subletters would be eligible to vote but not to stand for the board. AG said that fairness was the issue and that no half-way position made sense. The HLA should oppose all discrimination. The point was made that HfH were saying they wanted someone on the board who was part of the community. LH said it was only commonsense that only people living locally would want to be board members. The meeting was not in favour of the proposed compromise idea.

4 Community Energy Saving Programme

PH gave members an update on developments in the attempt to claw money back from the Council for leaseholders. The CESP obliged energy-providers to give home-owners free insulation but the Council had simply pocketed the grant money and put it towards the cost of major works which was then recharged to leaseholders. FLAG had taken up this issue and it was still being discussed. A Council meeting in December was to decide on it. The savings could be big. For a 2-bed flat in a block the saving would be about £1,000. If the Council doesn't take the right decision it had been agreed to go to a Tribunal. The targets of the programme included privately owned homes within social housing areas. Refunds would be automatic in the event of a positive outcome.

5 Speaker – Richard Wilson, Lib Dem leader (RW)

RW thanked the HLA for inviting him again and said he was pleased to hear that relations with HfH had improved. He mentioned the £3.7 in bonuses that had recently caused a scandal in the papers. In conversations with the Chief Executive he had established that the scheme had been introduced in October 2011 to improve efficiency and copied from Newham. 169 front-line staff had been eligible for bonuses but there had not been enough controls or checks. One worker on a basic of £25,000 got a £50,000 bonus. Only 10% of jobs had been inspected and exaggeration and duplication had taken place. 5 workers had been suspended. 2 had returned to work, 1 had left and 2 were facing disciplinary action.

RW had asked if no supervisors had raised concerns. There had been some worry about the cost of the scheme and this was what eventually led to it being investigated. Jobs over and above the normal attracted a bonus and the scheme was too generous. There had been no budget for bonuses. Leaseholders paid for the costs of repairs but bonuses may have been included in the management fee.

The investigation only went back as far as the spring of 2013 so 18 months worth of repairs had not been checked. It was worth checking bills. RW said he would continue to chase the issue with HfH's auditors to ensure that in future controls would be in place.

RW said he would be pressing for better payment terms for leaseholders. In Camden abseilers had been introduced to cut down on scaffolding costs.

RW referred to the planned merger of the Council's Director of Housing and HfH's Chief Executive. This was now possible because the rule about getting Decent Homes money only if you had an ALMO had been changed. HfH had not in practice been very arms-length. RW invited leaseholders' views on the

desirability or otherwise of folding the ALMO back into the Council at the end of the current Management Agreement (2 years).

RW then took questions. KW asked whether HfH was fit for purpose. Billing was chaotic. Islington had saved money by bringing the ALMO back in house. One member asked why the auditors had not picked up these problems. RW said he was trying to get hold of a report from Price Waterhouse Coopers. There was a question about leaseholders having to pay for leaks after poor roof repairs. PH said leaseholders should be given guarantee certificates as and when required and not just when they wanted to sell as Larry Ainsworth was suggesting.

SB declared the meeting closed at 11:45.