

HARINGEY LEASEHOLDERS' ASSOCIATION

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING HELD AT WOOD GREEN CIVIC CENTRE,
HIGH ROAD, WOOD GREEN, N22 ON SATURDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2019

Present: Sue Brown (Chair) (SB), Michael Blasebalk (Vice-Chair) (MB), Margaret Clapson (Treasurer) (MC), Nick Martin-Clark (Secretary) (NMC) and a total of 32 other members of the Association. Also present: Michael Hooper of HfH and John Bevan, Cllr and HfH Board member.

1 Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed members to the GM and thanked them for attending. She introduced Michael Hooper of HfH.

“We have 2 of the 3 candidates for the leaseholder position on the HFH Board present and will be inviting them to speak later on what they would envisage doing there and why you should vote for them. The third candidate was invited but declined to attend. The same questions asked here will be forwarded to her and she will be invited to respond on our website.

We've been busy in the last year renegotiating with HFH after regaining our recognition.

We have had to spend a huge amount of time over the last few years just trying to survive despite efforts to destroy us

I think we were a victim of our own success as HFH were desperate to get rid of us but we are determined that leaseholders should continue to have an independent joint voice

Now our recognition has been restored and we have frequent contact with hfh resident engagement Officers. However we are not being given all the practical help we used to get and which we really need to survive.

In particular it is extremely difficult for us to contact leaseholders. Our database is very old and outdated. We are not informed when leaseholders sell up and new leaseholders buy. There are nearly 5000 leaseholders spread over the borough. We can't go and knock on 5000 doors. HfH won't give us names and addresses because of data protection and have refused to send out emails for us. If anyone has any bright ideas about how we can contact leaseholders, we would love to hear them.

We think that Hfh is not offering satisfactory consultation with leaseholders in general

and further down the agenda we will tell you about our petition to HfH asking them not to cut down on the number of Leaseholder Improvement Forums they hold each year but rather to improve the running of them to attract more attendees. These forums replaced the Leasehold Panels which were originally held frequently and were well-attended. Again maybe victims of their own success. HfH don't like being held to account.

HLA have however still managed to continue to help some leaseholders in between fighting back. This year, apart from advising individual leaseholders who have contacted us, we attended meetings regarding the rehousing, temporary or permanent, of leaseholders on Broadwater Farm whose buildings will have to be strengthened or completely demolished due to insufficient strength in the case of a gas explosion.

Some still have ongoing problems. We are also still in touch with residents on the Love Lane estate which is also targeted for demolition.

Recently we have heard a lot of leaseholders complaining of demands from HFH for huge payments for replacement front doors to meet fire regulations. We have now arranged a meeting with HFH on Monday to discuss this topic. Some years ago we had a big success in negotiating with HFH regarding the right of leaseholders to install their own windows and would like something similar in relation to doors. However we have heard that even the window replacement is currently not being allowed. So there's a lot to be discussed. You will hear more about this further down the agenda."

2 Minutes of the AGM held on Saturday 29 September 2018

Mr Bevan and Mr Hooper were asked to leave while the minutes of the AGM were considered because of confidential items. The minutes were approved for accuracy by 15 votes to 0.

3 Matters Arising - confidential

4 Information Tribunal - confidential

5 Constitutional amendment

Cllr Bevan and Michael Hooper were readmitted to the meeting. The constitutional amendment relating to the ability of the committee to adopt minutes of General Meetings in some circumstances was passed by 21 to 0. The meeting also gave permission for the HLA to hold its next AGM in spring of 2020 in order to re-align with the end of the financial year 24 in favour 0 against.

6 Election of Secretary

NMC explained that as he now lived abroad it was not practical for him to continue taking minutes of meetings. Accordingly he was standing down as Secretary but would continue as a committee member. Those present were invited to come forward to fill the position but nobody volunteered to be Secretary.

7 Talk from Michael Hooper of HfH re keyleaseholder scheme

Mr Hooper stated that his position was Billings & Calculations Manager for the Leasehold Services Team. This had replaced the Home Ownership Team. The key leaseholder scheme existed to get scrutiny of the day-to-day repairs item on the service charge ahead of billing. Every year HfH carried out about 65,000 day-to-day repairs of which 20,000 involved a communal element rechargeable to leaseholders. Internal items are not rechargeable. After examination of whether estate or block costs were involved typically some 12,000 repairs were charged back as block costs. The charges were based on the Schedule of Rates of the National Housing Federation and no tendering was involved. There were about 550 key leaseholders and repairs charges breakdowns were made available on a quarterly basis. The scheme was well-received and had led to good interactions between leaseholders and HfH building up trust.

GDPR had affected the distribution of breakdowns to key leaseholders. Previously the breakdowns had included 'free text' descriptions of the repairs. But this risked infringing GDPR. Initially HfH had responded by removing these descriptions and replacing them by SoR codes. But this was incomprehensible to leaseholders and did not give them sufficient information. So HfH had decided to revert to including the 'free text' descriptions but would only distribute them after they had been checked by officers for any data protection problems.

MC said she had not received the paper copy of the breakdown she had requested. Michael Hooper said once they were notified that it had been GDPR checked. The need for checking meant that the process had been slowed down. SB said the breakdowns should be sent automatically.

A leaseholder said that all estates must be listed on the HfH system so he was disappointed that he'd been charged for work that had not been done on his estate. He had first raised this problem over 2 years ago. Mr Hooper said that block codes and estate codes were used by his team. Sometimes two blocks could have the same or similar names so mix-ups could happen. A leaseholder said that it was important to check the day-to-day repairs charges line by line. Mr Hooper was asked why GPS could not be used at the time of the repair to eliminate confusion about the location of the repair. He said his knowledge of this point was limited.

Mr Hooper said anyone could become a key leaseholder and just asked that they send in their name and address. Leaseholders welcomed Mr Hooper coming to ask questions

but said that it was important for all HfH departments to come along so that questions could be properly answered without leaseholders being constantly told that the problem belonged to another department. SB said the key leaseholder issue needed to be raised at the LIF.

Mr Hooper was asked whether or not other leaseholders in the same block as the key leaseholder could be contacted to ask their permission for the key leaseholder to give them updates. At present sometimes key leaseholders were able to report back to others on their estate but sometimes not. Key leaseholders could be used to publicise LIF and HLA meetings. One leaseholder suggested putting up notices on estate information boards or on dedicated ones.

8 Doors and windows

SB explained that the HLA had campaigned for leaseholders' right to install their own windows in the past. This was now on hold as a result of what was happening over doors. The HLA had received a lot of complaints about the fire-doors programme. Leaseholders were no longer allowed to install their own doors at all. A meeting had been arranged for Monday next with the Leasehold Services Team and the Asset Management Team. The cost of these doors has been high.

M Hardy said that the cost of the doors under the s20 notices varied a lot. From £1,500 to £2,500. This was too high. There should have been economies of scale. What explained the differences? Why was a charge for an asbestos survey systematically made when the Council was supposed to have an asbestos register? It appeared that multiple surveys were being done. Also the quality of the doors was an issue. If leaseholders didn't agree to pay in advance they were being threatened with court. It was best to agree a payment plan. HfH had been inflexible about payments.

M Blasebalk said HfH should not write to mortgage companies for outstanding major works bills because this could lead to the amount being put on your mortgage without your knowledge or consent. Leaseholders should write to their mortgage companies to make it clear they were not giving their consent.

M Hardy said that the post-Grenfell risk assessment did not necessarily mean new doors. Fire-resistant strips could be an answer. Different blocks would have different needs. Street properties were not necessarily affected but it depends on the Fire Risk Assessment.

There was a question about the lack of clarity over the installation dates. HLA agreed to post the outcome of the meeting with HfH on this issue on the website.

9 Leaseholder Improvement Forum

SB said the LIF was being run down. A petition about this was handed around. SB had asked who was running the LIF but hadn't had a clear answer. How topics got on to the agenda was also unclear. The HLA view was that the previous Leasehold Panel had been better. HfH were not giving people what they wanted with the LIF and that was why attendance had declined. HfH were now using this as an excuse for only having two meetings a year.

MB said he had been involved in the search for an independent Chair. An advert had been placed for someone with a background in housing. Two responses had been received but only one turned up for interview. His knowledge of running meetings had not been good enough. This was about six months ago and nothing had happened since.

NMC undertook to post the petition on the website. A leaseholder said that people should be encouraged to write in requesting the date of the next LIF meeting. This would put pressure on HfH to hold more of them.

Catherine Cavanagh asked why SB could not be Chair. SB replied that she had previously been the Vice Chair but that resident Chairs were no longer allowed. NMC explained that the Leasehold Panel had been abolished because it included a resident Chair. The Chair controlled what went on to the agenda. HLA had wanted to raise the topic of the abolition of the Resident Involvement Agreement but HfH had scrapped the Leasehold Panel instead. They had refused to allow the Chair to be elected even though it was mandatory under the Terms of Reference of the Panel.

10 Board member elections

SB explained that there was one leaseholder Board member. Of the three candidates two were present. The present Board member, Adzowa Kwable-Oklikah, had been invited but had declined to attend. SB invited the two candidates to present themselves, explain why they were standing and what they hoped to bring to the job, what they hoped to achieve and why leaseholders should vote for them.

MH said he was a surveyor working for a property management company. His experience gave him skills that he could use in improving services. He said scrutiny was very important.

Catherine Cavanagh said she had a construction industry background. She was working for English Heritage and had worked for 3 years with Haringey Council on a conservation project. Her experience was that maintenance was done poorly with a lack

of transparency and that communication was poor. She said there was a contrast between the elections which were well-publicised and where a lot of leaseholders took part and estate inspections which were not well-attended.

Both candidates said that the other would make a good Board member.

NMC explained that the HLA had sent in a petition as long ago as 2013 about leaseholder elections. HfH had changed their practice at that point and prevented landlord leaseholders from voting or standing. They had forced the then Board member to stand down on the grounds of ineligibility in order to avoid investigating a complaint about her. They were relying on defective wording within their Articles of Association that defined leaseholders as those living in their own properties. The HLA petition was for that wording to be changed but it had never been considered by HfH. The petition had been signed by over 100 leaseholders and had cost HLA money.

There was a question about whether enough postal voting options as opposed to electronic ones had been made available. The election period ended on 19th of September.

11 AoB

Lloyd Grandson gave an update on the situation at Love Lane. The Council had admitted that consultation over this had been flawed. The renewed consultation had been put back to 2022. LG explained that the idea was to regenerate the area surrounding the new Spurs stadium. The Council had been making offers to leaseholders and many had accepted even though the value of their properties would go up now that the stadium was finished. Many of the blocks were now given over to Temporary Accommodation.

There was a question about attending the meeting on doors. The meeting was open to anyone to attend.

The date of the next committee meeting was given out. To be held on 4th November.

There being no other business the meeting closed.