

Leaseholder Forum Minutes

Wednesday 26th January 2022

5pm – 7pm via Virtual Teams Meeting

Attendees

Stacey Hewitt (SH) – Leasehold Officer (Leasehold Liaison Team)

Mandy Goller (MG) – Leasehold Officer (Leasehold Liaison Team)

Sharon Kent (SK) – Assistant Leasehold Officer (Leasehold Liaison Team)

Cllr Aqbany (Cllr)

Number of Leaseholders in attendance = 18

Agenda

1. Introduction to online meeting

SH, MG & SK – Introductions to the team.

SH – Explanation of the virtual meeting process and use of ‘hand up’ to ask questions

2. Overview of last meeting and update of contact details request

MG – Brief overview of agenda from the last meeting on 23/06/21 and the agenda for today’s meeting. Polite request made to ensure that all contact details are kept up to date, particularly if sub-letting property, advised an online form will be on our website soon.

3. Service Developments:

SH – Update on service developments since the last meeting

Pre-RTB Interviews/presentations

SH – We have introduced interviews/presentations of key information, lease agreement obligations and in particular leasehold financial obligations and commitments in response to enquiries from leaseholders on these issues, to increase awareness to new RTB applicants.

Statutory Loans

SH – We are currently working on the introduction of these in line with legislation, particularly in response to major works being carried out to buildings in the city and in response to changes in Fire Safety legislation that will have a cost implication for leaseholders. Criteria will apply and further details will be available online in due course.

Discretionary Loans

SH - For those who do not meet the criteria of Statutory loans the council is developing discretionary loans, again there will be criteria that leaseholders will need to meet, amounts will be based on the statutory loans, but interest rates will be variable and include admin fees.

SH – The offer of loans is **not a substitute for independent financial advice**, and this must be sort before committing to any financial agreements, other options include such things as equity release, charge on properties, personal loans etc.

District Heating – Alteration requests

SH – Only LCC qualified engineers and appointed contractors can work on the district heating system, but we do acknowledge that some leaseholders have alterations requests over and above day to day repairs. We now have a process in place with AT Services to carry out DH alterations requested. If you have any requests, please contact the leasehold team via email at lcc-leaseholder@leicester.gov.uk. All work must be paid for before any work can commence.

Business Actions (BA)

MG – Explained the development of 5 Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) from consultations carried out 2 years ago. Business actions have been developed with the KPI's, so we can prioritise those BA's which can be logged, and we or anyone else can monitor our work and measure our performance. The BA's created are Breach of lease including ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour), Safeguarding, Invoice enquiries and Debt Recovery. We will be creating more BA in the future to capture work that we do.

Service charge debt and recovery of arrears

MG – We have been developing a service charge debt and arrears recovery policy and process. Payment of service charges is a priority debt and must be paid in line with your lease agreement within the financial year they are due. The ultimate sanction for none-payment is foreclosure, but we do want to avoid this. We do recognise that financial circumstances can change and if you experience financial difficulties contact the leasehold team or income collection for further advice.

Debt advice and signposting

MG – If you are experiencing financial hardship, please contact the leasehold team or income collection, we can signpost you to such agencies as Community Advice & Law Service (CALs), Citizen Advice, Shelter, Step Change and National Debt Line, that are support agencies for debt management and income maximisation. There may also be other support agencies available to you locally. There is also the LCC Household Support Fund for food and energy bill assistance.

4. City Projects

SH – Outlining of the many city projects ongoing at present.

Environmental Pest Control

SH - Initially aimed at St Matthews and New Parks areas of high-density blocks of flats with internal bin chutes and is a joint project between environmental health and housing teams to address issues with vermin. It aims to carry out work to block access areas for vermin and repair broken sewer pipes etc. Residents will continue to be advised to ensure that all food waste and rubbish is disposed of correctly and not to feed birds or pigeons.

Communal fire stopping

SH - Due to new statutory requirements with the Building Safety Bill and Fire Safety Bill due to be passed in parliament, fire safety requirements for communal areas will continue to be a developing

area for LCC. Currently fire alarms are being installed in the enclosed stairwells in the St Matthews estate blocks.

Lift installation – St Leonards Court

SH - An additional lift is now in its final stage of being completed.

District Heating (DH) meter trials

SH - The project to trial the installation of heat meters in DH properties is in response to mandatory regulations from central government, to save residents money, reduce global warming and contribute to carbon reduction targets. A pilot scheme is currently in the preliminary stages to see if our DH system is compatible for the introduction of heat meters.

Legionella Risk Assessments (LRA's)

SH - Visual inspections will be carried out to blocks with shared water tanks in the loft area, any further work will be dependent on the findings from the risk assessments.

Sprinkler Systems

SH - As part of our Fire Prevention Strategy, sprinkler systems will be installed in individual properties in the following blocks, St. Leonards Court, Framland House, Clipstone House and Gordon House. This will have financial implications for those leaseholders affected, but consultations are taking place.

Fire Safety Charges

SH - These charges will be separate to current service charges and will include payment for Fire Safety Inspections, Fire Safety Review and Administration costs, we will consult with you on the introduction of these charges.

5. Revised cleaning contract

SH - We are in the preliminary stages of reviewing the communal cleaning contract and we will be consulting with our leaseholders as part of the review process. There are two forms of consultation, the cleaning specification and section 20 consultation for the contract, for service improvement and to offer value for money.

6. Consultations and Working Groups

SH - We are inviting our leaseholders across the city to be part of a working group and be involved in our service development and ensure we meet your service expectations and to be representative for your area of the city. If you would like to be involved, email the leasehold team at lcc-leaseholder@leicester.gov.uk

7. LCC Buy backs

MG – LCC have first refusal in the first 10 years of your property being leasehold as per the lease agreement. LCC have a buy back scheme to re-purchase your property at full market value and you should contact the Housing Development team for further advice. Please note that you will have to repay 20% of the RTB discount for each year within the first 5 years after the initial purchase.

8. Covid update on resources

SH - This is under constant review and are still exercising a degree of caution based on local rates and continue to work from home, but we do have the resources to carry out face to face meetings via our Remote Assist platform.

9. Future invitations and consultations

SH - Please note that all future invitations will be sent via email and consultations will be online only.

10. Website for leaseholders

SH - We have a dedicated leaseholders webpage on the LCC website, please search for leaseholders at www.leicester.gov.uk

End of presentation

Questions:

LH – Although you may not be able to give specifics, can you give an indication of the possible areas type of works required in communal areas?

SH – The type of fire stopping works required is dependent on requirements currently set out in the Fire Safety Order (2005), but further works will be dependent on the new legislation in the Building Safety and Fire Safety Bills currently going through parliament and the requirements for communal areas. But we did want to take this opportunity to make you aware of the future implications this legislation could have regarding the financial impact on our leaseholders.

Cllr – Once an invoice has been raised for major work costs, would it be possible to pay monthly instalments, rather than requesting a loan?

SH – We do allow instalments to be paid over 12 months, but the statutory and discretionary loans are over further periods of time

LH – Can a copy of the presentation be emailed?

SH – Yes and a copy of the minutes if requested.

Cllr – The vermin control as indicated looks at communal areas being targeted, how about individual properties?

SH – Ultimately, we are responsible for the communal areas and the blocks are managed by Housing management and must be brought to their attention initially. But residents are responsible for individual property management, however individual properties can be looked at if the condition of the property is brought to our attention and if the condition of the property could potentially cause issues for the attraction of vermin, through hoarding or hazards due to rubbish accumulation in the property itself.

SK – Pest control do provide chargeable services to all residents for the treatment of pests, the treatment of rats is free.

Cllr – Could LCC not have agreements with external companies for discretionary rates for residents and leaseholders?

SH – Due to procurement procedures, we cannot recommend external companies. But there may be the opportunity to develop a process for invoices to be raised for treatment carried out by LCC pest control.

Cllr – Have concerns that the fire inspections are being missed, for example with regards to accumulation of rubbish in the communal areas and whilst the tower blocks have inspections weekly, the maisonettes only have monthly inspections.

SH – Fire inspections of the communal areas are carried out regularly and housing management have a zero-tolerance policy for all communal areas, but tower blocks have a greater risk of fire, hence why weekly. The new fire safety service charge will be relevant to the whole building/block.

Cllr – Can we know where the heat meter trials are being held?

SH – In the St Matthews area.

Cllr – There has been historical trials of heat meters carried out in this area already.

SH – We were not aware of this.

LH – So is the intention to contract out the cleaning service?

SH – That will be decided through the section 20 consultation, but potentially yes.

LH – Is the buy-back scheme a change to the current policy?

SH – The funding has changed, but the scheme is the same

SH – Do we have any volunteers who would be interested in being part of the working group discussed?

Names taken of leaseholders interested in this.

End of meeting – 18.40