

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **LEASEHOLDERS' FORUM** held on **TUESDAY, 28TH SEPTEMBER, 2021** at 7.00 pm in Remote zoom meeting

MEMBERS OF THE FORUM PRESENT

Peter Wright (Chair)
Isabella Luger (Vice-chair)
Philip Dunne
David Hart
Shravan Sood
Richard Walker
Thomas Watkins
Wolfram Westendorf

OTHER LEASEHOLDERS PRESENT

Andrew Purves	Ingunn Bjornson	Mac Lal
Anne & Bernard Cohen	Jennifer Fauquet	Martyn Swain
Bharti & Ranjan Vaja	Jerome Boughton Mills	Nasima Khanom
Bill Miller	Jerry & Mrs Junkere	Richard Pitts
Carolyn Morgan	Jonathan Evans	Sue S
Eileen Willmott	Joy Palmer	Suzie Gilbert
Fabi Pecile	Karen Dawson	
Imogen Pelham	Karen Rea	

ALSO PRESENT

Cheryl Hardman (Principal Committee Officer)
Hugh Boatswain (Senior Tenant Participation Officer)
Julia Gregory (Local Democracy Reporter)
Mike Edmunds (Head of Leaseholder Services)
Councillor Steve Adams

These minutes are in draft form only and therefore not approved or amended until the next meeting of the Leaseholders' Forum. Please note that these minutes include opinions expressed by the attendees at the meeting and should not be regarded as giving advice.

MINUTES

1. REMOTE MEETINGS HELD DURING THE CORONA VIRUS NATIONAL EMERGENCY

RESOLVED –

THAT it was noted that the meeting was being held remotely on Zoom due to the exceptional circumstances because of the Coronavirus National Emergency.

2. CONSTITUTION AND CODE OF CONDUCT

Consideration was given to the Leaseholders' Forum's Constitution and Code of Conduct as set out in the agenda papers.

RESOLVED –

THAT the Constitution and Code of Conduct be noted.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND INTRODUCTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Cindy Mughal.

4. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

There were no declarations of interest.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 25th May 2021 be approved as an accurate record.

6. PROGRESS REPORT

Consideration was given to the progress report.

Leaseholder Forum Elections

The Head of Leaseholder Services reported that there had been an article in Housing News inviting applications to become members of the Leaseholders' Forum. A number of applications had been received. Having extended the nominations period to 8 October 2021, there would be a further article in the newsletter delivered with the service charges.

The Chair commented that there had been a 10% response rate to the Leaseholder Survey and that the findings would be reviewed for lessons on how the Forum could operate in future. Remote meetings had enabled different people to attend meetings and this would be capitalised on.

The meeting discussed the potential reasons for why there was a lack of interest in the Leaseholders' Forum. These included a concern that their voices may not be heard, that the Forum had not resolved ongoing issues, that it needed to take a more campaigning approach, and that the method of advertising being used had not reached people. The Chair welcomed ideas for developing the approach of the Forum in the future.

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The St Silas heating scheme was raised by a leaseholder who wanted information about the charges. The Chair agreed that it was a complex issue and had been raised with the Government by the Fuel Poverty Action Group which was particularly active in discussing such schemes. He was willing to take on board any suggestions of what more the Leaseholders' Forum could do.

Concern was expressed about the perceived lack of engagement with the Forum. It was noted that there was only one councillor and few officers in attendance.

In response to requests for a breakdown of charges, the Head of Leaseholder Services commented that this was already available on the Camden Account. He offered to discuss this further with Jerome Boughton Mills and provide the breakdown that Mr Mills was seeking.

Action by: Head of Leaseholder Services

The Head of Leaseholder Services agreed to provide information on the caretaking service on the Tybalds Estate to Richard Pitts.

Action by: Head of Leaseholder Services

There was concern that the Camden Account was not easy to read with charges not broken down sufficiently. The Head of Leaseholder Services suggested that members of the Leaseholders' Forum could help with improving the information available.

Members of the Forum were asked to raise issues with the Chair prior to the meeting so that they could be added to the published agenda and the appropriate officers invited.

Leaseholders Survey

It was reported that one of the main issues arising from the survey was the need to improve communications. This was being addressed with Contact Camden through a series of workshops over the next six months to increase knowledge of how to handle different types of query. There was also work going on with the repairs customer team and planned works. The Council was also considering a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that would help all services to share information on what was happening with a particular property.

The Head of Leaseholder Services agreed to assist Carolyn Morgan with accessing documents on the Camden Account.

Action by: Head of Leaseholder Services

There was a discussion about the possibility of linking email trails about properties to the Camden Account. The Head of Leaseholder Services commented on an unsuccessful trial that had taken place a few years previously. In practice such a system would be difficult to implement. If a CRM system was implemented, those

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messages would be collated for officers to view but could not be shared with the individuals.

Written materials were being reviewed. The service charge guide was being rewritten for publication in October or November. A Major Works guide and Leaseholders' Information guide would follow.

RESOLVED –

THAT the progress report be noted subject to the points above.

7. LEASEHOLDERS' FORUM SUB-GROUPS

Consideration was given to the response to Leaseholder Questions on Planned Works.

The Major Works Sub-Group reported that they had not met but had communicated with each other. The Group currently consisted of Isabella Luger and Zulakha (Cindy) Mughal. Initial communications with the Head of Capital Works had not progressed.

Leaseholders commented on the speed of Council Tax demands compared with the speed of repairs. An example was given on serious rainfall in August causing damage to a flat but the soonest a repairs operator could attend was October. This would result in greater damage to the infrastructure of a Camden Council building. It was also noted that rainfall was forecast for the day of the repairs booking but that Camden staff did not provide prior notice if they were unable to attend. The Head of Leaseholder Services offered to chase the repairs team if the leaseholder emailed him.

Action by: Head of Leaseholder Services

It was suggested that the Head of Property Customer Services and Engagement be invited to a future meeting to discuss proposed improvements.

Action by: Head of Leaseholder Services

There was a discussion about the Leaseholders' Forum website and leaseholders were encouraged to share items for publication. Leaseholders could sign up for a daily bulletin to keep up to date. Issues that were raised via the discussion boards were answered by the Chair and other Members but if a query was more complex, the Head of Leaseholder Services would be consulted.

In response to comments about compensation for damage to property, the Head of Leaseholder Services advised that any damages should be logged immediately with the building insurer. The Council had an insurance manager who would challenge any rejections by the insurer. The Council also had public liability insurance in the event of the Authority being at fault.

RESOLVED –

THAT the response to Leaseholder Questions on Planned Works be noted.

8. HEAD OF LEASEHOLDER SERVICE UPDATE AND RESPONSE TO LEASEHOLDERS' SURVEY

Consideration was given to a verbal update from the Head of Leaseholder Services and the key responses from the Leaseholders Survey presented at the March 2021 meeting. He highlighted that service charge bills were being dispatched and that the Fire Safety Act 2021 and regulations from the Fire Safety Bill would impact on future service charges.

In response to questions about leasehold reform and the purchase of freeholds, the Head of Leaseholder Services explained that the Law Commission had reported to Government and made recommendations. Ministers would need to agree any changes, but at present, it was likely that Parliamentary time would be focussed on fire safety.

Concern was expressed that bills increased due to delays. The cost of construction was going up as leaseholders waited for repairs. The Head of Leaseholder Services acknowledged the difficulties and highlighted the range of payment options available, including a hardship scheme. However, leases were archaic documents with unhelpful restrictions on payment periods.

RESOLVED –

THAT the verbal update from the Head of Leaseholder Services and the key responses from the Leaseholders Survey presented at the March 2021 meeting be noted.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings were noted, subject to a proposed additional meeting at the end of November or early December 2021.

Action by: Principal Committee Officer

The meeting ended at 9.22 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END