

MINUTES OF ISLINGTON LEASEHOLDERS FORUM MEETING QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

WEDNESDAY 14th March 2007 @ 7PM

COUNCIL CHAMBERS, TOWN HALL

Present

Brian Potter (Chair) (BP)	Upper Street
Phyllis Mallin (PM)	Boleyn Road
Chris Radway	PFI/Partners
John Warby	Central Street
Joanne Arrowsmith (JA)	Holland Walk

HFI Officers

Doug Goldring (DG)	Director of Operations
Nigel Freeman (NF)	Home Ownership Manager
Alex Evans (AE)	Home Ownership Services
Aiden Stapleton (AS)	Project Manager

Partners Officers

Mike Edmunds (ME)	Head of leasehold services
Claire Thorogood (CT)	Leasehold manager

Apologies

Mary Morris-Dickson (MMD)	PFI/Partners
Dan Oakey (DO)	Isledon Road

Observers

J O'Dowd	Beresford Road
H Cagnoni	Wilmington Square
D Holliday	Bennet Court
M Hall	Stanley Terrace
R Tankard	Caroline Martyn House
Terri	Sadler House
O Adelaja	Sedgley House
R Rosser	Bushfield House
P Johnson	Elizabeth Kenny House
I Francis	Newland Court
C Tucker	Hemingford Road
J Harewood	Catherall Road
K Watts	Lofting Road
D Stevens	President House
A Kazakos	Dunoon House
M Hamilton	Hemingford Road
S Scaffardi	Ferriby Close

Items Discussed

ITEM	MATTER RAISED	ACTION
1.0	<p>Introductions and Apologies</p> <p>Introductions made.</p>	
2.0 2.1	<p>Questions and Answers</p> <p>The ILA ballot result</p> <p>BP I'm very pleased with the result of the ballot. The results will be published in <i>The Islington Tribune</i>, <i>The Islington Gazette</i> and <i>Inside Housing</i>.</p> <p>DG Of the 2120 leaseholders that voted, 76% were in favour. There was a turnout of 22%. Tonight we will discuss how we can move forward.</p> <p>Q Some people didn't get ballot papers. Why not?</p> <p>DG In some cases LBI Legal had not informed HFI of sales that had taken place, so the ballot paper was sent in the name of the previous leaseholder. I apologise on behalf of LBI for this, although sometimes the delay can be due to the inaction of the vendors' or purchasers' solicitors. HFI are micro-managing the situation regarding assignments to make sure this does not happen in the future.</p> <p>Q Is this just another way of the Council getting money out of leaseholders?</p> <p>BP No, but the fact that the letter came from Andy Jennings made some people think this. However, the vote was in favour of the ILA, so let's not rake over this. I have been sent copies of 4 letters written by leaseholders regarding the ballot.</p> <p>JW What is the next step?</p> <p>BP The easiest and quickest way forward is to retain the board that put forward the initial ballot. Once the elections have taken place for directors we can take it from there. It has not been decided if the directors will be selected by area or not.</p> <p>DG A lot of work needs to be done. The election process itself will take almost 3 months, and you also have to decide the terms of reference, a code of conduct, the service level agreement, the office location and what staff are employed. HFI will assist if required. The first thing to do is decide what the responsibilities of the directors will be.</p> <p>You also need to get a shadow board together. Currently there are 8</p>	

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	<p>members of the ILF, and so there are 6 vacancies, including for the areas that Lise Husebo and Richard Rosser live in.</p> <p>BP I propose that Lise and Richard are co-opted to the ILF.</p> <p>Lise Husebo and Richard Rosser were unanimously co-opted to the Holland Walk and Boleyn Road areas respectively.</p> <p>DG At the Business Meeting of next week we can discuss a timeline. It is unlikely that the ILA will be up and running by October. Therefore we propose that leaseholders are only billed for a 6 month period in their annual service charge estimate.</p> <p>BP We should base the ILA on what already exists for expediency. But nothing is written in stone, so I would appreciate any input.</p> <p>RR I am astonished that this ballot was rushed through before April, but won't be set up until October. I would have thought May is more feasible.</p> <p>DG We cannot charge for a full year if the service is not available for the full year. We will be open to a challenge that we will not be able to defend. Staff need to be employed and we need to agree a communication strategy. However, the ballot needed to take place before April, so that if there was a positive ballot, there could be a charge for this in the estimated annual charge.</p> <p>JW Is there no way to get something set up with what we have?</p> <p>DG We will move as quickly as we can, but we must be realistic. HFI have no wish to delay this, and will assist in governance and staff time.</p> <p>BP I would like to start the ILA tomorrow, but we must get this right the first time.</p> <p>DG We will start half an hour early next week at the Business Meeting to plan timeframes. Will Partners be involved?</p> <p>ME We will go with what HFI do.</p> <p>CW We discussed a potential legal problem about the charge. Has there been any decision?</p> <p>DG All charges are open to challenge. We have been advised by LBI Legal that we can charge for the ILA.</p> <p>If you wish to set up the group without the help of HFI then that is your choice. If you want our help we will give it to you. I agree that 6 months is a long time. If we bill for 6 months and it starts earlier then that is fine. However, if we bill from April and there is no service then there will be problems.</p>	

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2.2	<p>BP By the next meeting we will have timeframes set out, and we will report back to the ILF. We don't know how the ILA will be run yet, or where it will be situated. We cannot pluck these things out of the air, so all input is welcome. Please write to me or phone me.</p> <p>JW Can we see the letters that leaseholders wrote regarding the ILA ballot?</p> <p>BP You're welcome to have copies next week. The letters contained valid points, but nothing that we can't answer.</p> <p>JW It needs to be made clear that the directors will not be paid.</p> <p>Q Can we have someone with a legal background at the meeting next week?</p> <p>BP We can try to get someone from LBI Legal. We do not have to take their advice.</p> <p>DG I will ask LBI Legal to attend, but I can't guarantee they will be available at such short notice.</p> <p>Q Can we use the terms of reference that similar groups have in other boroughs?</p> <p>DG As far as I am aware this type of group is unprecedented, so no.</p> <p>RR We wrote the constitution for the ballot because we needed a starting point. But it will need to be changed once we are set up, as we will become a business or a charity.</p> <p>CR If we change the constitution straight away we will alienate those that voted in favour of the ballot, based on that constitution.</p> <p>BP This is the type of debate we will have next week.</p> <p>Partners for Islington questions</p> <p>CR Can we have an update on the Partners LVT, please? What is the position, why did you pull out, and what are the next steps?</p> <p>ME The background to the LVT is that Partners made an in principle application to the LVT in July 2005 to determine our preliminary and overhead costs, and our profits. We felt that the LVT were taking too long to give us a hearing, and the application is now out of date, so we have withdrawn.</p> <p>The next step is for us to write to all Partners leaseholders, both PFI 1 and 2, by the end of March. We will then discuss our actual costs with our contractors, and meet with leaseholder groups, such as PFILAG and the ILF, to discuss the way forward, through consultation.</p>	

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2.3	<p>Q Have you done an impact survey on how this will affect leaseholders? Who will benefit with the withdrawal?</p> <p>ME What both parties want to achieve is fair costs. There will be no adverse affect on leaseholders. Partners are losing out because we do not have the costs. Leaseholders are always able to challenge costs of service charges, even after they have paid them.</p> <p>CR It is regrettable that the case has dragged on for almost 2 years. Leaseholders have lost out in time and money by preparing for the LVT. This could have been avoided if Partners had not gone to the LVT, but just discussed this at the beginning with leaseholders, as you are now proposing to do. This is not the end of it, as the charges will still be very high. Very little has been offered by Partners so far. Will you be reasonable and transparent from now on?</p> <p>ME I agree that we need to talk. We will discuss with PFILAG as soon as possible. The principles of billing need to be discussed and agreed, and the consultation process improved.</p> <p>Q A long time is being taken for repairs to be carried out to my property, and it is deteriorating. It is a very stressful situation, and I'm not getting any information from Partners.</p> <p>ME We will arrange a meeting with you and your contractor.</p> <p>CR Back to the LVT case, Partners have offered to reimburse the expenses incurred by leaseholders, which is appreciated. Is it a requirement that leaseholders be compensated individually, or can it all be given to PFILAG, who have records of who contributed.</p> <p>ME We'll have to wait for the LVT to make a decision on our submission, but I agree that it is more practical for us just to deal with PFILAG.</p> <p>Homes for Islington questions</p> <p>Q On our estate the leaseholders of smaller blocks have to pay more than the leaseholders of bigger blocks, because the cost is divided by the number of flats. But we should all pay the same amount, as we are getting the same work done.</p> <p>DG You may not have seen the full costs. Once you have these we can discuss this further.</p> <p>Q People are not told the full picture about what others have to pay, and this leads to confusion and suspicion.</p> <p>NF We cannot tell leaseholders what their neighbours bills are, but I agree that we can make the overall picture clearer.</p> <p>Q So is this fair? It seems unfair to me for the costs to be decided by the</p>	NF

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	<p>number of flats in the block.</p> <p>NF Leaseholders can only be charged, and only want to pay for, the works that affect them, so it is fair as it can be. If you live in a smaller block you get some advantages that you don't get if you live in a larger block, but you also get some disadvantages.</p> <p>Q Why am I paying £380 a year for a concierge that is in a block I don't live in? I live in Dunoon House, on the Bermaton Estate.</p> <p>DG We will have to take this away and feedback.</p> <p>Q I was sent an estimated bill for major works of £5,000. I was sent the final bill 5 years later. Is this normal?</p> <p>NF Sometimes there is a delay, but 5 years is the upper limit, and we are getting better. Under the framework contract we now give an Agreed Maximum Price. There was a backlog on some final bills.</p> <p>Q Is interest paid to a leaseholder if they overpaid on the estimate?</p> <p>NF No, the lease does not stipulate this. We are not a bank, we don't act in the same way.</p> <p>JW Why are start up fees being charged separately on the works on my estate?</p> <p>AS The start up fees relate to two different contracts, with two different contractors. HFI did not have the money to do all the work at one time. Preliminaries are associated with all works.</p> <p>JW Are start up costs the same as management fees?</p> <p>AS They are different contractors, and so the costs are associated with different companies. But I will discuss the possibility of Apollo re-using their start up costs on different contracts.</p> <p>Q We are being charged for the contractor's congestion charge fees in the prelims. Why should we be paying this? Why can't they use public transport? And if it turns out that the contractors can't pass on the cost of their congestion charge to leaseholders, will the affected leaseholders be refunded?</p> <p>DG We will take you point about congestion charges to Apollo.</p> <p>Q The surveyor John Halpin did an independent report on the major works carried out to Blenheim Court last year. It was suggested that £50,000 would be made available for future surveys. What happened to this money?</p> <p>DG We estimated that £50,000 might be acceptable from the service charges. The Blenheim Court survey was a trial. The report was delivered</p>	<p>NF</p> <p>AS</p>

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	<p>after a long delay. We wrote back to Halpin, and have not had a response. Consequently, we do not feel it was a successful trial, and at the moment we do not have the resources available for further funding. However, what the ILA chose to do with their funds once they are up and running will be their decision.</p> <p>Q Do Kier's profits go to Islington?</p> <p>BP 50% of their profits go to Islington.</p> <p>DG I am not an expert on the Kier Islington contract. There is a profit share agreement.</p> <p>Q Why should there be a profit? Can't they do the works at a lower price?</p> <p>DG The contract was agreed in 2000 by Islington. It is for day to day repairs. Kiers are a private company and are therefore profit making.</p> <p>BP The reason for the agreement was as an incentive to Kiers to do the work as quickly and cheaply as possible, and for Islington to benefit from this. But there is nothing to stop Kiers overpricing.</p> <p>AS If there is any underspend the money goes into the Decent Homes kitty. This happens on most projects.</p> <p>RR I advise leaseholders to check their day to day repairs costs.</p> <p>DG From July the bills will be available in advance of the actual bills being produced.</p>	
3.0	<p>Date of Next Meetings</p> <p>Question and Answer session 9th May 2007 Council Chambers, Town Hall, 7.00 pm to 9.00 pm</p> <p>Business Meeting 21st March 2007 Council Chambers, Town Hall 7.00 pm to 9.00 pm</p>	