

Leaseholder Action Group Meeting 25th September 2023

Attendees

Leaseholders: Rosemary Johnson (Chair), Pete Earl, Keith Marston, Lucy Endean, Titus Foster, David Finlay, Stella Hine, Judith Baron, Guy, Gary Alexander, Casey Robins, Maria Underhill, P Debutzkoy, Debbie Tabys, Julian Emin, Phil Shaw, Reg Hookes, Patricia Bartley, Christine Duff, Yulca Lambrianides, James Beattie, Diego Faccioli, Angela Goodman, Andreas, Cleo Dibb, Ian Sawyer, Mary Howard, Pip, Suna.

Staff: Geof Gage (Housing Investment and Asset Management), Simon Plotkin (Leaseholder Services Manager).

Other: Lee Catt (ASB Support Group), David Croydon (B&H Housing Coalition).

Unidentified: 2 phone numbers, 'Ipad'.

Apologies: Graham Dawes, Derek Peacock, Mrs Sheila Cumming-Rogers, Mrs GF Walton, Julie Hayward, Jayne Milne, Catherine Kirby, Angela E, Jim Hornsby, Andrew Sangster, Philippa Carr, Gee Soon Harris, Diana Walles, Patricia Farchy, Donald Tonner, Jenny Knight, Jamie Thompson, Louise Allum, Joe Mincer, George Bainbridge, Hazel Platzer, Babs Condren and Debbie Webster.

Minutes produced by: Sabina Karabasic

1. Welcome and Introductions

As above.

2. Apologies for absences.

As above.

3. Update on recent issues

3.1 Concrete

Issue of collapsing concrete that has been shown on the news. Is this something we should be concerned about?

- Geof Gage: No there is no 'RAAC' (Reinforced Aerated Autoclaved Concrete) on any of the housing block so they will not be effected by this issue.

Questions:

- How did we get that data?
 - o There was a survey in 2005, 2012 and 2016 that shows no use of RAAC.
- Was RAAC what you were looking for in that survey?
 - o Yes.
- Can this be given in writing?
 - o It is on the website that we have established this.

3.2 Cladding

It has been discussed that there are Surveys & Certificates conducted on the type of EWI (External Wall Insulation) used, to confirm its safety and to be used for mortgages – is this still happening?

- Yes they are in the process of doing these surveys now of all high-rise buildings with EWI, they have done 3 blocks, and have to complete 18 in total.

How do you clarify high rise?

- Anything above 11 meters.

Geof confirmed each block will have a certificate available – but they expect to not have all complete for at least another 6 months.

3.3 Buildings Insurance

There was a period where the insurance provider dropped out, and then was placed on a temporary contract, and are now going out to tender for new building insurance supplier.

- Staff confirm this is going out to tender now and that this will be consulted on again.
- Takes time as not many places do that sort of contract.
- Hopefully with EWI surveys it will help bring charge down.

Questions:

- Told we would be billed the difference for more expensive temporary insurance in September, but haven't had this yet.
 - o This will be next September.
- One bedroom properties in cheaper areas of Brighton, paying the same building insurance as bigger properties in more expensive areas. Is this legal and can it not be done so that they aren't paying an average rate?
 - o Yes this is legal. This was done previously as it was the best rate offered. For new contract they are looking at the possibility of different rates dependent on property.
- Can a leaseholder provide their own insurance if it covers all necessary bases?
 - o No, the lease is very definitive that the council need to supply the building insurance.
- Leaseholders pay 20% of total costs incurred for building, does the percentage not take into account the size of building and is this applied to the insurance there?
 - o No, the insurance is not dependent on this percentage
 - o 1 policy for all leaseholder in council, and they currently pay the same rate. This policy covers just for the leaseholders share of that building not for tenant flats – that policy is covered by BHCC.

Action: Geof/Simon to gain clarity from Insurance team on the different policies for leaseholders & tenants. And clarity on specific issue with electricity wires running over building.

Leaseholders Group ask that can it be into a 'case by case bases' as current system not equitable.

- This is currently what's being looked into. This sits with procurement team.

Procurement Team to be invited to attend future meeting.

3.4 Estates Development Budget Re-charging

Chair provides context on the Estates Development Budget (EDB) - a fund the council run, to which Resident Associations, or informal groups of residents, can put in bids for funds to do something to improve their estate, eg. for gardening, murals, or starting up events.

Some EDB projects that benefit a particular block have, in previous years, been recharged to leaseholders in that block. The leaseholders may not have realised this, as the EDB costs were included on the list of "Repairs" billed on the annual Certificates of Expenditure.

An update from LAG Chair regarding recharging:

- There was a proposal put forward that no EDB projects would in future be recharged to leaseholders. This was unfortunately turned down.
- So in future, you may get recharged for an EDB project.
- However - rechargeable EDB projects are rare.

(tenant fund for improvements to estates or projects etc) and that some bids can be in part re-charged to Leaseholders. This is rare, but it has happened in the past.

Q. Leaseholder asks question of when this information will be available online as this was previously promised.

- Simpon provides explanation that there has been complications with this as an online system would show the notes too which would be a giving out personal details so currently it is not an option.

Q. Hadlow Close: Some years ago, many blocks communal areas were painted, but one block missed – is this something that can be done through an estate's development bid?

- Chair clarifies that the EDB policy is they won't do routine things under EDB such as wall repainting (this would be recharged to leaseholders).

Q: why has this been changed so we now get billed?

- Chair clarifies it isn't a change; it has always been like this. It was a possible future change, but this was not agreed.

Speak to the Community Engagement Team if you are interested in EDB.

4. Works programme – majors, minors and planned – Geof Gage

4.1 Currently Underway

5-year programmes

- Currently they are going into budget consideration – which they are finalising now.
- Going to committee soon (Jan & Feb).
- From Feb we will have plan confirmed but he cannot publish right now as this could change after committee.

Condition Surveys

- Undertaking a lot of condition surveys on the blocks – to see what they need to improve as they are looking forward to 10 year plan.

4.2 Planned/ future projects.

Questions

- Will leaseholders be able to have copies of surveys?
 - o Yes – apart from commercially sensitive content.
 - o Charge for surveys goes to the project charges. If no project is done as a result, these surveys are charged under admin charges.
- What is done for communications to let leaseholders know about surveys and invite them to have a say?
 - o Received letter from team introducing surveyor and then it will go from there.
- What blocks are you looking at?
 - o Geof can share lists of blocks.
- Why has door replacement scheme taken so long?
 - o This was put out into tender in 2019 and 2020 and there was no bids made – later on one bid was made but this was unsuitable.
- How are they going to understand needs of leaseholders?
 - o 'Leasehold liaison officer' was previously off sick for 2 years but has now resigned so they have begun recruitment for this post (at time of the meeting, the post was out).
 - o Chair suggests that Leaseholders could invite surveyors to their blocks coffee mornings, so they could go for walk around and see the estate and start building relationship which helpful for both leaseholders and contractors. This is what Craven Vale had done.
- If you had your door replaced last round, will it be replaced again?
 - o Yes.
- Will someone from east Sussex fire service be involved in door replacement?
 - o No, we do not engage with the fire service to do our products as it's the councils responsibility to assure they have correct doors.
- Is there a fire risk assessment taken out given that fire service is not involved?
 - o Fire assessment taken on by council itself – outside contractors do that – type 4 fire risk assessment to all high-rise blocks.
 - o Surveyors 'Oak leaf' – experts in the field.

One leaseholder expresses concern that although there is discussion of early engagement, she has had no communication about window replacement. As she has just moved in she believes she is entitled to compensation as she could have negotiated a different price upon purchase.

- Action: Simon to follow up on query.

Action: Geof/Simon to check about Park Mead bottom floor window/door replacement. (approx. 1hr into recording)

5. Reports from committee and reps

5.1 Plans for future events

Plan for next meeting: 27th November (Monday evening).

Venue – available for rest of city, get in touch with chair if you have a venue in mind – if not it will be at Craven Vale.

Agenda setting – get in touch if there are any items you want to be discussed on the agenda.

Plan for a Summit in late Jan/early Feb – possibly Hove Town Hall. AGM elections will take place at this.

5.2 Chairs Items

The Committee this year has been talking about a session on the new online housing system and how it works – possibly put a date in the diary for some point and can share date in summit.

Welcome letter – still being worked on.

Questions

Is legionella and if this was included in conditions survey?

- Geof confirms there is a separate survey for this and this is done by company called HSL – who undertake inspections every 2 months and provide reports.

What about water tanks in attic of properties?

- Water is checked. Geof can look into individual cases, request to speak to him outside meeting.

Who's responsibility it is to replace windows and how much leaseholders are charged for replacements?

- Chair: your flats % of the cost of replacing all windows.

Do we need to do communal windows if the windows that are in the bin room?

- **Action: Geof to look into whether communal windows need replacing in Rowan House.**

One leaseholder hasn't received paperwork for window replacement, she is concerned she won't know how much it costs before works start.

- They do this block by block so will be sent to first 3 blocks and then so on so you will get notified of costs before work start.
- As the council goes out to lots (5 years) so you got told they are going to use what they are already tended on.
 - o LAG Committee member: If you can prove you haven't been sent something, Section 20 Notice states that you can only be charged max £250 per flat if works have been undertaken.

Leaseholder shares that they don't believe any less than a year is enough notice, if it's a large sum like £8000.

- Council is legally obliged to give 30 days

- Geof shares that they want to give as much notice as possible, and do have payment plans that can be discussed with leasehold team.
 - o Chair explains that you can arrange meetings with Leaseholders and team at council to work out payment plans.

5.3 Area Panel items.

- Lots of questions regarding window replacement, laundry & weeds – if anyone would like more detail, speak to chair
- Communication between residents and council – this is being referred to I&E group
- LAG have reps from North & West, but need Reps from Central & East – get in touch with chair
- Anyone can go to an area panel.

5.4 Home, I&E – service improvement groups

Anti Social Behaviour

- Lee (LAG member) has created ASB crib sheet on what to do if you experience ASB
- Leaseholders are urged not to suffer in silence.

Home Group Rep Pete Earl

- Major piece of information hasn't been able to get due to delays in committees.
- Also no one there from repairs at Home group
 - o Repairs updated to be requested for LAG for next meeting.

6. Round Robin – issues or good news stories.

Can BHCC confirm that the lagging in the roof space meets with government recommendations in terms of materials used, depth and condition?

- Yes

Geof & leaseholder to discuss individual query about above outside meeting.

Question raised about Leaseholder who are renting flat back to council. Tenants have contacted with water issue, that was in July and still nothings been done.

Action: Simon/Geof to follow up this with repairs.

Half Hadlow close car park privately owned, who is this owned by?

- Half number bays are leased to individual residents who may wish to lease their own parking bay. If you want to apply for one, contact Benjamin Tedder.

- The other half is counted as part of the road and is line with the parking scheme in the area and can be used by anyone who has a general residents permit.

Queries why roof works bill received for £6000, when leaseholder lives in basement flat.

- This is the flats % share of the communal works as per the lease and is chargeable to all leaseholders.

Individual issue raised about recycling/bin collection (ongoing for a year).

Action: Geof to send this on to the correct ward councillor.

New leaseholder has explained that he has had a great service with the council, timely response and repair.

Meeting end.