

Leasehold Forum Meeting

16 May 2023

Minutes

Present: Julie Hood, Housing Equalities and Engagement Facilitator

Peter Holt, Housing Team Leader (Accounts and Assets)

Total number of Leaseholders 14

Apologies: Yvonne Burns.1 received from a Leaseholder

Julie Hood, opened the meeting and welcomed everybody

She reminded the meeting that:

- although you are sitting in your home you are in a meeting; please do not do anything you wouldn't do in West Offices e.g. eat
- that everyone is in the meeting for their own reasons
- to treat everyone with respect at all times, this includes staff, attendees and any organisations present/discussed in the meeting.
- let others raise their issues
- Housing issues are the only issues staff may be able to change, they have no influence over other CYC departments e.g. Council Tax, Parking etc
- if it is suggested that your issue will be investigated outside of the meeting do not continue to discuss it
- no items will be discussed in any other business unless they have been sent 7 days prior to the meeting, under any circumstance.

Peter Holt introduced himself.

Insurance

Peter Holt

Peter Holt has met with our, Insurance Manager, about providing a more comprehensive insurance policy for Leaseholders. She has engaged with the market, feedback being that the market has contracted substantially as companies were paying out against lots of claims and not making any money. However, there are two companies who are still prepared to provide a policy.

To obtain a price the following information needs to be submitted for each property:

- Property Type
- Address
- Sums Insured – Need to confirm if this is the block or flat. If it is an individual flat the information will take some time to pull together. The rebuild price of the flat will need assistance of property services.
- Any other information i.e floors
- Property Reference Number

As there are only two companies now providing the policy the market isn't in our favour and the expectation is that the individual cost will be triple figures.

It was agreed that Peter will gather the necessary information and ask for quotes. Hopefully the quotes will be available for the next meeting.

Several individual insurance issues were discussed

Open Housing and the Customer Portal

Peter Holt

Open Housing brings together all Leasehold information to one central place. All Leasehold details have been moved onto the software.

Leaseholders need to register on Open Housing. The individual account will give the last 10 repairs relevant to the block. This will enable Leaseholders to monitor the repairs and to raise any queries with the Leasehold Management Team. There will be no cost information on Open Housing.

As this is a very new system there have been a few teething problems. One of them is that service charge statements are headed rent statements. The consensus of the meeting was that the heading should be changed to reflect that it is a service charge statement not a rent statement.

It is very much a work in progress with improvements still being identified.

Future of the Leasehold Forum

Julie Hood

At the last meeting Leaseholders discussed the purpose of the Forum as some of those present did not think that the meetings are useful.

Several years ago Leaseholders told us that they wanted a forum to discuss issues specific to Leaseholders. They wanted to meet with City of York Council Officers regularly so they could be kept up to date with any changes in legislation; kept up to date with changes in service provision, influence these changes and had an opportunity to raise any areas of concern relevant to their lease.

We know that leaseholders change, viewpoints change and so the way we engage with leaseholders may need to change.

Leaseholders present discussed the future of these meetings with the consensus of the meeting being that the meetings are useful and should continue.

It was noted that the meetings are a very valuable forum for leasehold views and to share experiences. They also give the sense of belonging to a group. Holding the meetings via zoom is cost effective and environmentally friendly.

Updates

Peter Holt

Peter updated the action plan. See the end of these minutes

Recent consultations

In order to meet our requirements under legislation all leaseholders must be consulted in regard to procuring new contracts. This means that Leaseholders who will not receive the services need to be included in the consultation.

The meeting was asked if the letter is clear that not all leaseholders will receive the service or if improvements could be made. The consensus of the meeting was that the letter should be very clear that not all Leaseholders will be affected. Peter will make changes to the letter.

There followed a discussion around procurement and the procurement process City of York Council follows. The meeting agreed to invite a member of the procurement team to the next meeting. To enable the member of procurement to prepare for the meeting the Leaseholders

present agreed that any questions should be sent to Julie prior to the meeting. This information will be sent to Leaseholders with the invitation to the next meeting and will be sent earlier than usual.

Communal area inspections

The Leasehold Management Team will be starting to inspect communal areas over the coming months. They are producing a programme of work which will be rolled out later this year.

The programme will be communicated to Leaseholders who would be welcome to join any of the inspections.

The Leasehold team can be contacted by email housing.leaseholder@york.gov.uk or phone 01904 551550 option 4, option 4

Any Other Business

The following items of any other business were received from Leaseholders at least 7 days prior to the meeting:

1. Smoking by Council tenants: Language MUST be added to tenant agreements about smoking near bedroom windows and balcony doors. The balcony off the living room is the ONLY outside access for the leaseholder, their only fresh air. Covid damaged their left lung and also people with EDS(h) (a genetic disorder of connective tissue, lax joints, ligaments and other soft tissue. Other symptoms can be weaker lungs and digestive systems) have weakened lungs. Smoking endangers their health and destroys their quality of life. The tenants have laughed and smoke DIRECTLY below their balcony.

R - The tenancy agreement only prohibits smoking in communal areas of the building. Preventing smoking on a balcony is not enforceable under the current agreement and would require a change to the tenancy agreement by Housing Management and the Council Executive. The Portfolio holder for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods will be agreed at the Annual Council meeting on May 25.

2. NO DISABLED PARKING at all within 20m of the front door of the building.

R – Peter Holt will raise this with Housing Management and see if this can be addressed

3. How can we investigate whether a garage is still owned by the last leaseholder? The sellers were dishonest about a lot of things.

R – We would be unable to disclose this information. The Land Registry may have this information.

4. Solar panels would be nice

R- This is something that will form part of the Councils drive to achieve net zero, although I am unaware of any specific projects for this in the short term

5. Service charge: Leaseholder Gardening; Leaseholder Insurance; Leaseholder Lighting; Leaseholder Management fee, why is my share shown to be 100%?

R - This is system generated and the 100% is your sole costs. These costs are calculated by dividing the total budget spend by the number of leaseholders

6. Service Charge: What is the nature of the item Leaseholder management Fee of £278.15? Who performs this management activity? And how do you determine the amount of this fee?

R- The management fee is part of the service charge payable to City of York Council in return for managing the leasehold property. It covers staffing costs, administration costs such as S20 letters and annual service charge production

7. Service Charge: Why does my share climb to 16.67% from 6.25% for items A0000145 and A0033532?

R - Both of the jobs at 16.67% were raised to the entrance. The other jobs raised at 6.25% were raised to the block. The reason for the difference is that this entrance serves 6 properties, so the cost of any job raised to the entrance is divided by 6. Whereas there are 16 properties in the block, so the cost of any job raised to the block is divided by 16.

8. Service Charge: In relation to all items dated 2022, what is the nature of these items since we have been paying maintenance charges last year?

R - Repairs are billed retrospectively for the previous year, so the 2023 bill will show repair for 2022

9. Service Charge: I was unable to pay my bill on automated system and very kindly eventually I was given details to enable bank transfer. Not everyone has computer banking (nor wants it)

R- We are reviewing service charge billing to make improve it for next year

10. Repairs of brickwork that seem very over priced and no one at the council can tell us what was done (address provided to enable the following information to be given)

R - Jobs are raised based on a schedule of rates. The description for this is - Take out small metal box to the entrance porch brick up and render

11. Grass not been cut and left to grow /work me coming and cutting one section at the front then never finishing have pictures

R - Contact the Leasehold Management Officer who can discuss with Public Realm to resolve

The following items of Any Other Business relate to the management of tender for repair and maintenance work. The Leaseholder agreed that these should be addressed at the next meeting by a member of the Procurement Team.

12. How does City of York Council tender work to ensure you have an adequate number of bidders given the multitude of contractors in Yorkshire or vicinity, who are starved of work?

13. How does City of York Council establish sound cost estimates?

14. Has City of York Council set up reliable checks and balances to iron out conflicts of interests and to prevent contractors getting into Cartels and forcing a bid price?

15. In respect of the letter regarding the window contract dated 19 April 2023 ref QLTA-Windows:
- a. To award the works of £731,597.70 to one bidder is absolutely unacceptable for the obvious reasons:
 - a) You do not appear to have a prior cost estimate for the same works established by an approved qualified third party against which you would assess the bid price
 - b) This one bidder is obviously fixing the price as they wish.
 - b. So we ask as leaseholders, how can you justify such an unfair approach?
 - c. The reasonable way expected would be to seek tender from a minimum of five bidders, notably, contractors in Yorkshire or nearest if need be.
 - d. I do realise that the more bidders you have the higher the workload in evaluating the bids, but that is the only reasonable way to do the job, to ensure that the leaseholders under your commitment are not gazumped.

Next Meeting

A date in September/October 2023, to be confirmed.

Action plan

1. Explore providing more comprehensive insurance for leaseholders

Action - Peter Holt to discuss with CYC Insurance team

Target date - December 2022

April 2023 – Will require writing to all leaseholders to find out what if any structural alterations have taken place along with obtaining rest of info Insurance have identified in previous update. See agenda item 1 above)

Previous - On Hold. Insurance advise they need to know the full address including postcode, type of property, number of bedrooms and bathrooms and each unit will require a rebuild sum insured. Peter Holt looking into rebuild sum, however some leaseholders have added additional bathrooms / en-suites and CYC do not have full data for this

2. Creation of Leaseholder accounts on new ICT system, allowing management of service on one system

Action – Peter Holt and Asset team working with ICT to build, develop and test new system

Target date - March 2023 Now complete

April 2023 - Data load completed and Leaseholders now fully managed on Open Housing.

Previous - Initial build and test complete. Leaseholder data and service charge data needs to be uploaded and tested January 2023.

Leaseholders need to complete new direct debit mandates for new system. Letter to go out December 2022 explaining new system along with mandate to be returned before February 2023

3. Leaseholder access to Open Housing self serve portal, allowing leaseholders to see what repairs have been raised to the block

Action – Peter Holt and Asset team working with ICT to build, develop and test new system. Leaseholders need to create Open Portal account

Target date - March 2023. Now complete

April 2023 - Access to portal now available to leaseholders and registration letter has been sent

Previous - Access available to leaseholders as of December 2022.
Letter to be sent December 2022 advising leaseholders how to register for the portal

4. Parking Project

Action – Peter Holt has sent list of properties to Parking enforcement team as of December 2022

Target date - June 2023

April 2023 - Properties being loaded onto Traffic Taranto System.
Advice being sought from Legal on wording for signs. Design and cost of signs being looked at.

Previous - Parking enforcement need to serve Traffic Regulation Order with a 3 month lead in time before new scheme can be activated.
Letters to all residents early new year explaining scheme

5. Leaseholder Manual needs revising and updating

Action – Peter Holt to invite input from Leaseholders on reviewing the documents

Target date - June 2023 Now complete

April 2023 - Consultation complete and amendments completed. This document will now be HTML Web page so there is no cost – anyone needing physical copy can have word doc sent to them

Previous - Requests for leaseholder input to be sent April 2023