

Leasehold Forum Meeting Minutes

Venue:	Heslam Park
Date:	21 st January 2016
Time:	5-7pm
Ongo Homes Attendees:	Lesley Warburton (LW) Beckie Willing (BW) Richard Clark (RC) Caroline Twilley (CT)
Leaseholder Attendees:	8
Apologies:	8

1. Welcome, Introductions and Housekeeping

LW welcomed everyone and went over the fire regulations and ground rules.

2. Purpose of the meeting

LW explained about the company rebranding to Ongo Homes to remind everyone that this took place on 4th January 2016.

LW explained once again about the recent changes to the team and the people who have left us and that it is now LW as Home Ownership Manager and BW as Home Ownership Assistant.

3. Leasehold Information

LW gave an update regarding the current situation with the fire doors. She explained that most properties are starting to have their doors fitted and the rest should be completed soon. She explained that for those leaseholders who have not engaged with us further action will be taken against them to ensure that their door meets the fire safety requirements.

LW explained that at the end of February to the beginning of March the estimated service charge invoices will be sent out.

She explained that the management fee is currently being reviewed to reflect the team changes and changes made to the finance team given their

involvement in processing direct debits and account reviews. A leaseholder asked whether the fee would be going up or down and LW explained that until the review is done we will not know that. It was suggested that as the team is smaller it should be less and LW agreed that that particular element of it should be lower, but it would depend on the other matters being reviewed as to whether the overall charge will increase or decrease.

A leaseholder asked why the finance team come into it and LW explained that provide a service as much as we do, in monitoring the accounts etc.

A leaseholder suggested that if they are having to deal with failed direct debits then it is not fair for everyone to be charged for a few people missing payments. Ongo Homes' profits should cover it and leaseholders shouldn't be expected to pay for that. It was suggested that we would be charging the same as a bank would.

LW explained again that it was all part of the review and all points would be considered. She said that we would consult with them with regards to any significant changes made to how the management fee was calculated.

Customer Engagement

LW introduced CT from the Customer Engagement Team who began to explain what their team does in terms of customer engagement and that this doesn't just involve Ongo Homes' tenants and they would like more leaseholders to get involved.

She explained about the various panels that leaseholders can get involved in and that a new Customer Engagement handbook is currently being updated. The handbook will be made available to all leaseholders when it has been updated. CT used one example being the Maintenance Panel that a leaseholder present at the meeting is a member of. CT said that members may have skills that can question management choices and improve the work and services provided, which may in turn save money.

The present leaseholder who is a member of the Maintenance Panel championed panel membership explaining that he feels like he is given the opportunity to make a difference and that it is important that more leaseholders get involved.

A leaseholder said that he had been in his property for 10 years and he had never heard of the Customer Engagement or Resident Involvement Team. CT explained that there was a Resident Association in his local community 3-4 years ago and that her team would have supported that. CT also explained that all customer engagement opportunities are always advertised in the Key News and on the



Ongo website.

She explained that they organise the carnival which is held every year. This activity is to put back into the local community and is used to support local groups and to advertise community interest groups.

CT said that Customer Engagement also supports managers to have open conversation and involve customers in the decisions they make.

A leaseholder asked what their success or claim to fame was. CT explained that their team are measured on outcomes and it is all about what a difference the residents have made in their area and how they have improved various services.

CT explained the role of a tenant inspector who inspects work carried out by workmen and contractors on behalf of Ongo. CT again reiterated that it is all about helping residents/customers to make a difference.

A couple of people present questioned the attitude of previous staff. They were told that decent homes major works that were being carried out to their blocks was nothing to do with them.

RC explained that at the time of transfer it was a priority to bring properties up to date and their attitude probably wasn't what it should have been.

LW said that we need to look where we are now and where to go from here. Leaseholders are a small percentage of the stock and it is therefore important that we engage with as many of them as we can.

A Leaseholder said that it is about building trust and that it is clear that the current team is concentrating more on building trust with leaseholders. It has been the best it has ever been and if there are any issues they get sorted. A leaseholder said that the team is approachable and if he telephones, something gets done.

It was suggested that the new Customer Engagement booklet would be sent when available, perhaps with the invitation for the next meeting. CT said that a team member from the Customer Engagement team would be at the next meeting to update the forum with any updates and to answer any questions they have.

4. Consultation

LW explained the concept of Allpay and that it is something



already available to tenants. Anyone who wished to take up this method of payment would be issued with a swipe card to pay their accounts. It means payment can be made via a website, over the telephone or at a PayPoint, where you can pay gas and electricity bills.

Someone suggested that the arrears would increase but LW emphasised that direct debits are still preferable. This is merely a way for those people who don't like direct debits and have to travel into one of our offices to make a payment.

Most of the people in attendance pay by direct debit and thought it would be best if we asked everyone individually to gauge response.

LW mentioned that there may be a small charge for production of the card and someone replied that if it is in place for everyone currently, then to add 300 people shouldn't cost anything, certainly not the leaseholders.

It was agreed that consultation would be done across the board with perhaps a letter or email.

With regards to the Customer Satisfaction Surveys LW explained that further to feedback received at the previous leasehold forum meeting, we are looking to change the questions to make it clear which element of the service the questions are about so that feedback can be attributed accordingly.

A couple of issues were raised, with question 4 it was suggested that we ensure people know what a communal area is as people perhaps believe this to be outside which is actually amenity space. It was suggested that this question be split to 'communal areas' being defined as communal entrances and 'amenity space' being defined as areas serviced through our ground maintenance contract.

It was suggested that perhaps the survey should be anonymous because even though we might like the chance to speak to people about issues they may not want to talk to us and may be more truthful if it is anonymous. They can leave details if they wish to be contacted.

Feedback from the forum has highlighted that the team of apprentices carrying out the survey perhaps lack confidence and experience regarding leaseholders. LW informed the forum attendees that training will be carried out with the apprentices for the up and coming satisfaction survey in order to improve the knowledge of the apprentices.



It was also raised that when an apprentice telephoned a customer they asked for confirmation of their address. It was questioned as to whether this was necessary as the apprentice would already know this to be able to contact them at all. This will be addressed in the training carried out with the apprentices.

Another concern raised was knowing who had called for the purposes of the survey. Certain leaseholders received a voicemail and when they returned the call via the NLH switchboard and asked for the person who left the message, they were told that no one of that name worked there. This then led the leaseholders to believe that they had been the target of a cold caller and caused suspicion.

It was also suggested that because the number appears as private, people may not answer. It was suggested that perhaps a text message be sent out ahead of the phone calls starting to make leaseholders aware that they may be getting a call from someone about a survey. This was a popular suggestion.

Finally, LW raised the topic of our Housing Quality Network accreditation and that all accreditations across the organisation have been reviewed by the Resident Scrutiny Panel. This is due to the changes the government are making and the pressures this is placing on Housing Associations across the country.

LW explained that it was awarded in 2014 and something which is reviewed yearly. The HQN assessor helps us to improve our services by applying an objective, and challenging scrutiny process. The award acknowledges that high standards have been attained in relation to department process and customer service.

The Resident Scrutiny Panel decided that the Home Ownership accreditation should be put to the leasehold forum to decide whether or not it should continue.

LW confirmed that she would send more information about the accreditation so that people could make an informed decision about whether they think it should continue.

Mr Wiseman said that he would like information about all the accreditations awarded to Ongo as a whole. CT said she would look to provide that for him.

LW thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

