

Tenants Council Minutes

Rent Setting

Lambeth Town Hall, room 8

Thursday 19 January 2006

7:00 – 9:00PM

<p>1.0 Attendance Nominated Delegates and Deputies Bill Alison Roberto Ballardini Cathy Butler Rita Fitzgerald, Vice Chair Lynda-Anne Garwood-Warren Jean Haley Robert Hall David Hart Nicholas Helleur Edna Jarvis Jean Kerrigan, Chair Irena Kowalewska Ros Munday, Vice Chair Graham Nicholls, Ex-Chair Ray Pucky Pat Scahill Bill Willingham Joyce Wilson</p>	<p>Clapham and Stockwell – Deputy North Lambeth – Delegate Norwood – Delegate North Lambeth – Delegate Clapham and Stockwell – Deputy Norwood – Delegate Brixton – Delegate Clapham and Stockwell – Deputy Brixton – Delegate North Lambeth – Delegate Brixton – Delegate Leaseholder Council Clapham and Stockwell – Delegate Streatham North Lambeth – Delegate Clapham and Stockwell – Delegate Clapham and Stockwell – Deputy Brixton – Delegate</p>
<p>Elected Members Cllr Jeremy Clyne Cllr Bernard Gentry Cllr John Kazantzis Cllr Keith Fitchett Cllr Robert McConnell</p>	<p>Leaseholders Champion Conservative Labour Executive Member for Housing Liberal Democrat</p>
<p>Officers Chris Adamson Gerard Caulker Paul Cook Kevin Creed Mary Lynch</p>	<p>Head of Housing Management Support Resident Involvement Manager Head of Housing Resources Resident Participation Officer Division Director Housing Services</p>
<p>Apologies Ray Farrow David Green Ella Lewis Joan Light Mandy Scholfield Marilyn Proctor Roger Roach</p>	<p>Norwood – Delegate Norwood – Delegate Clapham and Stockwell – Delegate Cottington Close TMO – Delegate Clapham and Stockwell – Deputy Resident Participation Manager Clapham and Stockwell – Delegate</p>

<p>Matt Toussaint Chris Vaughan</p>	<p>Brixton – Delegate Leaseholders Council</p>	Action
<p>2.0 Welcome and introductions</p> <p>2.1 The chair welcomed everyone</p> <p>2.2 Mary Lynch apologised for the late arrival of the papers and said there would be an investigation into why the final rent paper was not included in the pack that was hand delivered the previous night.</p> <p>2.3 Mary Lynch outlined the current management arrangements while the fraud investigation continues. She also explained that Molly Wallis is on compassionate leave.</p> <p>2.4 ACTION: Tenants Council sends their best wishes to Molly Wallis and her family at this difficult time.</p> <p>2.5 There was a short discussion about the current fraud case ‘Project Ruby’. Councillors stated everything possible is being done to get as much money back as possible. The police are seeking the person who is alleged to have taken the money. Lambeth will do a risk assessment to determine which legal routes to pursue in order to get as much money back as possible, considering the cost of all legal fees as well. Delegates voiced their concern that though good procedures were in place, the audit has shown that these were not followed. Delegates wanted to be assured that all procedures were now being followed. Officers confirmed that training was going to take place with managers and senior managers over the next week to ensure all procedures are followed.</p>		
<p>3.0 Minutes from 8 December 2005 and matters arising</p> <p>3.1 A mistake in 4.3 (garage rents) was noted: “Rents on garages have been at £5 per <i>month</i> for a few years.” Month should be <i>week</i> instead.</p> <p>3.2 Minutes agreed with above change.</p> <p>3.3 On point 4.15 (Sheltered Housing repairs and working group) the chair asked that this point be taken up at the Service Improvement Form scheduled for Monday, 23 January 2006.</p> <p>3.4 On point 5.1 (late delivery of papers) delegates again pointed out that the papers for this meeting were late, but also that there seems to be a problem with the post room in Hambrook House. One example was given of a paper put in the post room on 29 December to cancel a meeting on 5 January, but it was only posted on 3 January and at second-class postage.</p> <p>3.5 ACTION: Cllr Fitchett requested Chris Adamson look into this matter with the post room and report back at the meeting scheduled for 16 February.</p> <p>3.6 The chair also mentioned that the post room had opened a letter marked ‘private and confidential’.</p>		
<p>4.0 Referrals</p> <p>4.1 Brixton: EDM 48 (backing direct investment in council housing). The Brixton Area Housing Forum requests Lambeth Council and Lambeth MPs to support this national campaign for the ‘Fourth Option’ as it provides a level playing field with RSLs. There was a vote taken to record that Tenants Council supports the backing of this initiative. There will be a meeting on 8 February that TC would like Lambeth councillors to attend and support.</p>		

<p>4.2 North Lambeth: Working Group overseeing the Executive Member for Housing. The North Lambeth Area Housing Forum would like to know the remit of this group and how this will impact on the day-to-day running of Lambeth's housing services. Cllr Fitchett said this working group needed to be established in light of the current fraud case. He noted this group is an advisory group only and that his day-to-day duties remain the same.</p> <p>4.3 Residents then voiced their frustration with the apparent slow-down in works being carried out due to payment issues. One delegate was aware that a few contractors were asking when they might expect payment on outstanding invoices at a contractor meeting. Delegates pointed out that in order to answer to residents' questions they need to know what is going on.</p> <p>4.4 Officers said that the central procurement team are working to resolve the backlog. There are also going to be training for about 150 officers on the new procurement process over the next week.</p> <p>4.5 Cllr Fitchett said he'd like to see more tenant involvement in the procurement process to make it more transparent. Delegates said they would rather have confidence in the officers so they didn't have to be there. They also asked that when they alert officers to a potential problem that they are taken seriously and action is taken. This requires a culture change. Several recent examples were given where residents warned there might be problems, and now a year later officers are looking into these.</p> <p>4.6 ACTION: TC requests that the council ensure that Capital Programmes are not being delayed and they would like to have a list of all of the Capital Projects that have and have not been agreed to date for the next meeting in February.</p> <p>4.7 ACTION: TC would like an update on the Road Map</p>	
<p>5.0 Rent consultation paper 2006/07</p> <p>5.1 Paul Cook delivered this paper.</p> <p>5.2 Cllr Fitchett highlighted the main changes from December's paper: 1. The rent section hadn't changed much, but officers are now aware of approximately how many tenants will receive rent reductions; 2. Service charges will only increase at the rate of inflation, as opposed to the higher rate suggested in the December paper; 3. Garage rents will remain at £5 per week for this year until a proper audit has been undertaken. This audit will be concluded in enough time to influence next year's budget.</p> <p>5.3 Officers informed TC that next year's rent consultation process could be done earlier as it won't be necessary to wait for the final determination from Government. The process is moving to a two to three year timeline. He reiterated that the council doesn't have the ability to move away from the rent-restructuring process dictated by Government as there are penalties if the council charges either higher or lower than expected rents.</p> <p>5.4 There was a discussion about the need for a comprehensive audit of the garages in Lambeth before any changes in rents are proposed. Delegates suggested a two-tiered rent system for residents versus non-residents. Some delegates pointed out that Lambeth has been talking about garages for some years with no action.</p> <p>5.5 Communal heating was also discussed as part of the service charges. There</p>	

<p>were questions about the value for money residents are getting for their heating charges when there are communal boilers. Individual residents aren't able to influence their charges, as they don't have control over the heating system. There was the suggestion that some heaters may be on for the entire year though it is policy to have them turned off during the summer.</p> <p>5.6 On the rent increase: some delegates argued that rent increases are a social issue and could send people below the poverty line and therefore suggested officers look for ways to avoid rent increases to assist these tenants.</p> <p>5.7 Officers said the council has discretion on their service charges, including unbundling of the costs, for garage rents, but due to the rent convergence dictated by Government (between RSLs and local authorities) there was little choice in the rents. Officers did point out that the rent charged by RSLs is kept in check by a rent tribunal.</p> <p>5.8 Delegates pointed out that they had asked councillors to petition Government on these rent convergence rules. They are asking again this year.</p> <p>5.9 TC took a vote on each of the proposals outline in the paper: they AGREED on all 10 points individually, reluctantly agreeing to points 1 (That Lambeth continues to follow the rent restructuring scheme as required by Central Government) and on point 5 (the actual rent increase). They also requested that on item 7 (garage rent) that criteria on who is eligibility to use them are published.</p> <p>5.10 One delegate raised the issue of sheltered housing in Lambeth and their heating charges. He asked when the proposed Sheltered Housing Commission was going to be started to look into such matters? Officers advised that George Marshman in Adult Services is currently looking for an independent chair.</p> <p>5.11 The chair of TC requested all Lambeth councillors attend a meeting in Parliament on 8 February to demand changes to the way rents are calculated.</p> <p>5.12 TC AGREED that they would like councillors to attend the meeting in Parliament on 8 February to demand change to the rent procedures; also the delegation from Tenants Council should attend the Lambeth Council meeting on 22 February, where the rent increase will be decided, to express their concerns.</p> <p>5.13 TC AGREED that all residents of Lambeth should be actively informed of any and all rights to benefits that exist (but would rather not put tenants in the position where they need to do this i.e. with higher rents).</p>	
<p>6.0 Any other important business</p> <p>6.1 Delegates expressed their disappointment with receiving their papers late.</p> <p>6.2 One delegate raised the issue that a request for information on 14 September 2005 still had not been fulfilled. The information requested is the amount of money spent on leaseholders services. The information had been promised the following week. The delegate stated that the matter would now be taken to the District Auditor. Officers said that the information would be available the following Monday at the next Housing Service Improvement Forum meeting.</p> <p>6.3 Another delegate who also has an outstanding request from September wants to know the number of unauthorised occupants.</p> <p>6.4 There was frustration with the way that two of the rent consultation meetings (in Brixton and Norwood) were scheduled on the same night, causing officers to be</p>	

very late to the second one. Questions were raised about why this was allowed.

6.5 Sheltered housing commission. Delegates have heard that this commission is to complete its work by the end of May. It was asked how this could be possible if they haven't even started meeting yet. This has been a long time coming and the delegate stated that TC had voiced concerns that this would be the case going between both the Housing and Social Services departments.

*Key to action groups: **AHM** = Area Housing Managers; **CHM** = Central Housing Management; **HPS** = Housing Property Services; **SP** = Strategy & Partnership; **TC** = Tenants Council