

Minutes for Leasehold Forum – 8/7/2019 6.30pm – 8pm

Civic Centre

ATTENDEES:

There were 11 Leaseholders attending representing: Taranto Road, Castle House, Keynsham Road, Wadhurst Gardens, Canute House, Culver Close, Kingsland House, Fullerton Close and Howards Grove

Lepsa Stojkovic – Tenant Engagement Officer

Maureen Whitcombe – Leasehold and Right to Buy Officer

Rose Dean – Leaseholder and Right to Buy Officer

APOLOGIES: Leaseholder from Taranto Road

Welcome:

Lepsa welcomed everyone to the Forum and ran through housekeeping. All attendees introduced themselves.

Minutes of the last meeting:

Lepsa read through the minutes of the last meeting – minutes agreed.

Matters Arising:

Forum dates -A representative from St James Close had asked if SCC could email dates of the meetings to all Leaseholders.

Maureen advised we were unable to email due to GDPR but that Debbie had sent out letters to all leaseholders inviting them to the Forum. We were pleased to see a number of new attendees this evening.

Rose advised that we are also in the process of trying to add the next Forum dates to our email banner.

Clean and Green - Maureen advised that she had asked the Housing Officer for Castle House about the Clean and Green initiative and charging points for electric cars, however, they was unable to provide any other information. Maureen advised that there was now a tab on the SCC website front page which gives further information and also an email address – greencity@southampton.gov.uk

Phone Lines - Questions have been asked in previous meetings to amend SCC phone numbers so that they show the number on the call screen instead of withheld number. Maureen confirmed that this is still in hand but had been delayed due to IT changes.

Action: Maureen to update again at next forum.

New Health and Safety Group members:

This had been crossed out on the agenda and a representative from Castle House asked for an explanation.

Lepsa advised that Tenant Engagement Team is looking to set up a group to monitor Health and Safety updates following Grenfell. Debbie is unsure who will be on the monitoring group.

Action: Debbie will update at next meeting.

Training update and suggestions for the future:

Lepsa explained that the previous training session on promoting good practice in tenant participation and engagement had been cancelled due to lack of interest. They asked if there were any other areas where Leaseholders would like to receive training.

Previously training had been held on Web safety, upcycling, understanding the lease.

Suggestions made were: understanding invoices & service charges, how to extend the lease, understanding section 20 process & explaining what permissions leaseholders might need if planning changes in their properties- what they are allowed to change/not change.

Lepsa advised that the Leaseholder put forward to speak at the Summer Conference has unfortunately had to pull out.

Action: Debbie will review training in the future.

Webpage and Tenants' Link update:

Maureen advised that an article on buying leasehold flats on the open market had recently been added to the Leasehold webpage and will also be in Tenants' Link.

Rose advised that she has prepared some information on Permission Requests to give general advice on what work within the flat requires permission and what doesn't.

A question was asked as to what would happen if work had already been carried out and Maureen advised that this would be picked up if the property went up for sale

and may cause problems at that point. However, if there are any concerns Leaseholders can contact permission.requests@southampton.gov.uk. We confirmed that the guidance had been drawn up in conjunction with Permission Requests and was currently with them for approval. Once completed this will be added to our webpage. A representative from Castle House asked if they could have a copy of this information for the Castle House newsletter.

Action: Rose/Maureen to send a copy of Permission leaflet to Castle House representative once approved.

Actual Process:

Maureen and Rose advised that all data had been received and collated ready for testing this week – this should last approximately 4 weeks. The lease allows us to send out the statements by the end of September, however, if testing goes well we are hoping to have the statements ready to send mid. September 2019. These will be for the 2018/19 period.

Flat Roofing Project:

Maureen and Rose advised that there is a section 20 process commencing for a roofing project and letters would be sent out to all leaseholders. A caveat would be in the letter to ignore if this work had only recently been carried out. Approximately 61 blocks have been identified for the initial works and further information would be provided through the section 20 process. Further blocks may be added at a later date if required. Maureen confirmed that she is hoping to have the project manager for this work at the next Forum in September to take any questions from Leaseholders.

Any Other Business:

Insurance:

A representative from Kingsland House asked what was covered by the block insurance – Rose advised that she will post a copy of the policy summary and details of where to find further information on the Leasehold Webpage to the leaseholder's address. Rose advised that leaseholders should obtain contents insurance if they are living at the property and that they should advise their insurer if the property was being let out. Maureen also confirmed that if a Leaseholder was not living at the leasehold property, they need to keep Leasehold Services up to date with all contact details to ensure that all correspondence, invoice details are received. We also need an emergency contact if required. Rose advised that we had recently had to force entry to a property as a leak was flooding the flat below. The leaseholder was abroad and could not provide entry.

Action: Rose to send insurance details to representative from Kingsland House.

A representative from Castle House advised that they had recently been to a sprinkler demonstration as these are due to be fitted shortly at Castle House. Neil Tomblin asked them to contact their insurers as it may reduce their contents premiums – they asked if buildings insurance premiums would reduce.

Action: Leasehold Services to contact Insurance Department to ask that question.

Water Bills:

A representative from Canute House advised that they is paying £45 per month for water and a neighbour was paying £24-27 per month – they is on 8th floor of the block. They wanted to know if it was possible to have a water meter.

A representative from Castle House advised that they had asked for a water meter to be fitted and a surveyor from Southern Water attended. They advised that as the flat were above the 8th floor in block, it was not possible to fit a water meter and they were awarded a rebate because of this. They advised that Southern Water Surveyor also told them the water bills are higher above the 8th floor as it is worked out on the rateable value. The Leaseholder at Castle House advised the representative from Canute House that that anyone can ask for a Southern Water Surveyor to attend the property.

Action: Leasehold services will look into whether SCC can help with the installation of water meters at properties and report at the next meeting. We will contact Canute House independently.

Parking Barrier at Castle House:

A representative from Castle House advised that the parking barrier was damaged in the wind in March 2019 and it took until May to repair. The reason being was that the original supplier was not local and advised that they could not provide an ongoing service. SCC then had to put another more local contractor in place who originally said that they could not repair another contractor's work and would need to install their own equipment. In the end the repair was completed by contacting the old contractor.

The time taken to carry out this repair led to a lot of people using the car park that should not have been able to.

The representative asked if SCC could confirm that when any new contractors are put in place, they are able to provide ongoing assistance to existing equipment.

Action: Leasehold Service will try to see who is responsible for implementation of new contractors and report at next meeting.

Lease extensions:

A representative from Castle House asked if we could request someone attend the meeting who was involved in lease extension. They have looked at the information online and through the Lease Advisory Service but would find it really helpful to have someone at the Forum who could answer their questions.

The leaseholder at Canute House was concerned over the amount of years left on the lease. They was advised that this should be shown on the lease documents provided when the flat was purchased. The lease commences at 125 years from when the first flat in the block was sold.

Action: Maureen will contact Leaseholder at Canute House to advise of years left on the lease.

Leaseholder Services will try to arrange a speaker at a future meeting.

Tenant engagement will also look at possible training in this area.

Air bricks:

A representative from Keynsham Road has asked about the air blocks in the property as they go through from the outside of the block into the flat. The energy rating is very low because of this and they wondered whether the blocks can be replaced by a private tradesperson or whether SCC would consider replacing.

Maureen advised that as the air block is on the outside of the property he may not be able to do anything himself.

Action: Rose will contact Capital Assets for clarifications.

Repairs:

A leaseholder in Howards Grove advised that they had recently had a blocked drain and found problems reporting this to Repairs.

Rose advised that it would depend on where the blockage is, Leaseholder would need to ask their own plumber to attend – if the blockage is outside of their flat then repairs would need to attend.

Maureen and Rose advised that they had recently had a meeting with Repairs as they had also experienced difficulties regarding leasehold properties.

Repairs are looking to amend the online form to make it easier for Leaseholders to report a repair online. Cannot be fully updated yet as some issues need to have clarification from Legal.

Purchasing the Freehold:

Representatives from Wadhurst Gardens and Fullerton Close asked for information on purchasing the freehold of the block. Rose advised that Quayside Road had been sold, however, this had been solely leasehold for a number of years.

Rose advised that as far as she knew there had to be a certain percentage of leaseholders and also those willing to be included in the purchase of the freehold.

Action: Rose will obtain more information to be given at the next Forum meeting and will also contact representatives from Wadhurst Gardens and Fullerton Close directly.

Parking:

The Leaseholder at Canute House added that they pays for monthly parking but could not find anywhere to park when they returns home late at night. Rose advised them to contact Highways to see if anything could be done.

**Date of the next meeting 23 September 2019 Civic Centre Committee Room 1,
6.30 – 8.30 pm**