

**Partners for Improvement in Islington  
Residents Forum Meeting**

**Minutes of the Residents Forum**

**Held at 6.35pm on Thursday 19 November 2009**

**At the Town Hall, Upper Street, Islington**



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**Present:**

**Forum members:**

Susanne Lamido (Chair)  
Michael Adedeji  
Suzanne Bryant  
Shirley Bryant  
Chris Graham  
Tim Clark  
Rose-Marie McDonald  
Lisa Crowley  
Chris Matthews  
Richard Bunting

**Partners:**

Ed Butler, Head of Quality  
Tom Irvine, Customer First Manager  
John Venning, Asset Manager  
Richard Stanley,  
Liz Voss,  
Cathy Patterson,  
Casey McCann,  
Ryan Mills,

**Homes For Islington:**

Eileen Abbott, Contract Commissioning Manager  
Martin Church, Contract Commissioning Manager (technical)  
Simon James,

**Disability Action in Islington:**

Liz Mercer

**Observers:**

Susan Haskins  
Tony Lewis  
Jacquie Evans  
Khalid Waheed

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**Apologies:**

Saeed Abdulrahim  
Richard Best (Vice Chair)  
Christopher Cavendish  
Muriel Duncan  
Georgina Galliers

## 1. Urgent Business

- 1.1 Chair announced bringing Liz Mercer forward to follow minutes and matters arising.

## 2. Minutes and matters arising

- 2.1 SL explained we are trying to streamline and improve the minutes and documents / reports format.
- 2.2 SL confirmed that Associate Directors on the HFI Performance Management Committee are not Directors, in response to an enquiry from CG.
- 2.3 TI confirmed January meeting will not be at Town Hall because of room availability. The venue will be confirmed as soon as possible. TI
- 2.4 The Forum decided Christmas Party will be 17 December 2009.
- 2.5 CG on point 2.11 about digital aerials – there is no mention of whether there are any charges for installation of digital aerials. Eileen Abbott will respond to this enquiry. HFI
- 2.6 MA on point 2.13 – JV advised there are standard charges for tenants and leaseholders. Eileen Abbott to come back on this. EA clarified charges only apply where there is an existing digital aerial. HFI
- 2.7 SL asked Partners to provide details of how many Partners properties have communal aerials and how many properties are involved in the digital upgrade by Homes For Islington. JV
- 2.8 The Forum agreed a correction to the spelling of *out-of-hours* (item 3.5 on minutes of 17 September 2009). TI
- 2.9 The Forum accepted the minutes.

## 3. Chair's report

[Item 4 was covered before this item in the meeting]

- 3.1 SL reported that she has had a great response on the email; everybody has said we don't have to respond to you, but we all read it.
- 3.2 SL reported she met John Holman and had a professional meeting.

3.3 SL – I want the HFI consultative panel papers removed from the agenda. CM asked who will decide if the papers are relevant. EA said that HFI Contract Commissioning Team can point out which items they think are relevant. Partners can highlight these on the agenda.

HFI  
AAS

3.4 TI asked who wants to continue to receive the paper copies of the HFI consultative panel reports. CG, RM, SB, ShB – paper copies required.

TI

#### **4. Disability Action in Islington Focus Group**

[This item was covered before item 3 in the meeting]

4.1 SL introduced Liz Mercer.

4.2 LM explained that she works for Disability Action in Islington (DAII), a local disability action group working for people with disabilities in Islington. She has been to Forum before. DAII already works with HFI and Partners, and has a panel of residents. Two of the tenants are Partners tenants. DAII works with the panel to work out where services can be improved for disabled tenants, trying to make services to disabled residents equal with non-disabled.

4.3 LM - DAII has worked with Partners for some time: improving access to complaints process; creating easy to read handbook for tenants with disabilities. Awareness training for staff. Improving services for deaf tenants. Ongoing work with HFI. Other areas of work include mental health and learning difficulties.

4.4 LM - One of the issues has come up because two tenants on the panel are Partners tenants – already done some work with Partners – trying to make sure Diversity plan is good or meeting needs of Disabled tenants. Delivered some training to a small number of Partners staff.

4.5 LM - I was approached recently by EB to ask if DAII would facilitate a focus group with disabled tenants to see if there are any barriers to disabled tenants accessing partners services. Contacted by 8 people. Little bit low. Shows how hard it is to reach disabled tenants. 7 people attended.

4.6 LM - one person couldn't attend and LM interviewed her over the phone. Not living at the property at the moment because she is having the refurbishment. She said staff were always polite and courteous. She has now been out of property for nine months for a job which should have taken 6 weeks. LM has written up that case study and will submit it to Ed Butler as part of the report.

- 4.7 LM - The Focus Group Looked at various aspects of service. Main focus was access to services and signposting to services. The focus group will be written up and submitted to EB who will use the feedback to create an action plan.
- 4.8 LM - Main message – staff needed to be more aware of the needs of disabled tenants. Perhaps receive more training specifically about people with disabilities. People with various impairments and people with hidden impairments. Disabled people covers a broad range of people. Definitely some more disability equality training. People thought that would help staff in equality impact assessing. HFI have moved to routinely booking BSL interpreters when an appointment is booked for deaf tenants.
- 4.9 LM - Another issue that came out was that people felt that Partners don't always enforce the existing tenancy or leaseholder conditions. Particularly noisy neighbours issues. One of the issues came up was wooden or laminate flooring contributing to quite a difficult existence. Tenancy conditions not being rigorously enforced may have a disproportionate impact on some disabled people.
- 4.10 LM - People felt Partners need to do more to make complaints process accessible. HFI and LBI have up-front policy that you don't need to make a complaint formally in writing. It's about using complaints for service improvement. Staff need to pick up on concerns and say we can record that as a complaint.
- 4.11 LM - There were several issues raised around contractors. Perennial problem. Now that people use contractors more and more there is a greater responsibility to ensure that contractors stick to agreed standards. They may tick the boxes, but on the ground the contractors need to understand the needs of disabled tenants.
- 4.12 LM - Another big issue was that Partners needs to make a concerted effort to collect the access needs of its tenants. Otherwise people have to keep telling different agencies. The information doesn't get communicated across an organisation. There was a discussion about the difference between collecting information for monitoring purposes. But that is different to collecting access and information needs. Access and Information needs have to be recorded against its.
- 4.13 LM - People need the money for childcare expenses on the day, if not before, otherwise they will be excluded and you won't hear their voice.
- 4.14 LM - One person reported that they had been subjected to disability related abuse. Although it was reported to Partners

and there was a programme of action, it was not treated seriously enough. It wasn't treated as a hate crime which patently it was.

- 4.15 LM - Signposting. People felt that if you're a tenant, you do come across your landlord a lot, so it's useful if staff are appraised of other things and agencies which might be helpful to them.
- 4.16 LM - It illustrates that you do need to reflect on issues that impact on disabled tenants.
- 4.17 CM commented that some of those issues are not specific to disabled tenants.
- 4.18 SL said that the lady who has been out of her home for 9 months has been in touch with SL who is working with Partners to get it all sorted.
- 4.19 SJ commented that HFI keeps a database with details of all tenants. At present we have about 73% of all the available information. Gaps exist in information about disabled people.
- 4.20 Shirley B reported she has a sister in an HFI property who is blind and that HFI's communication with her is very bad. SJ said they he would look into that.
- 4.21 EB Partners also has a similar system of recording access to services information including disability system. We have some way to go before we have as much information as we would like.
- 4.22 RMM commented that it was a credit to Liz Mercer how much and how quickly I felt at ease at the meeting run by Liz.
- 4.23 SL thanked Liz Mercer for attending.

## **5. Tenants compact**

- 5.1 SL introduced Simon James.
- 5.2 SJ explained as follows.
  - 5.2.1 SJ - My appearance here stems from the letter you sent Sean McLaughlin last month. Patrick Odling-Smee replied saying that he would ask HFI to attend and I am here to respond to this, because the Council delegates the responsibility to HFI.
  - 5.2.2 SJ - Every year we have an annual review of the Compact. We review the changes to the compact over the last year. We ask residents views through the panel. What you have

SJ

before you is a paper produced in May which I understand didn't come to the Partners Forum.

- 5.2.3 SJ - There have been changes since the compact was established. But there are underlying principles which remain. Those are the fundamental themes of the compact. Every year we go to the panels, comments are made, and we take them back.
- 5.2.4 SJ - ILA has taken over the role of Islington Leaseholders Forum.
- 5.2.5 SJ - There has been a review of support to TRAs. Service level agreement with FITA has ended. TRAs remain important, but you need to ensure you are talking to those people who don't attend TRAs and Forums, and there is an expectation that we will speak to them, to younger people, to disabled community and to ethnic minorities.
- 5.2.6 SJ - We formed the Resident Involvement Register. We contact interested residents in the way they want to be contacted enabling them to be involved in any aspect of the service in any way that they want. In general we try to contact those residents no more than 2-3 times a year. This doesn't replace the TRA structure, but works alongside it. This is another important plank of this year's Tenant Compact summary.
- 5.3 SL commented that there is a variance between what HFI is doing and what Partners is doing and she thinks they should be the same.
- 5.4 SJ explained that HFI does oversee Partners contract, but Partners is also its own organisation, but we all agree that all residents should be entitled to the same good services.
- 5.5 CG - The strategy is left to the Council. Residents don't just include HFI and Partners residents.
- 5.6 CG suggested that for future meetings the Forum invites all the councillors to attend these meetings. That would give the Forum the connection back to our landlord. It would also give access to them about strategy, such as selling off properties, or whether HFI continues.
- 5.7 CG - There was recently a document which said that 40% of management charges are currently spent on things other than the delivery of core services. Over the last few years, HFI has cut back the number of housing officers. In Islington there are some 52M spent on gross management costs. 3.1M is spent on Anti-Social Behaviour. These are some of the things which we should be consulted on before our rents are

spent in that way. I did ask a question at the full board recently, and I'm waiting for the answer.

- 5.8 EB said either Partners can invite the councillors on the Forum's behalf, or the Forum can do so.
- 5.9 MA I suggest we invite the councillors with the portfolio for Housing and Community Safety, and the shadows. In Islington the current people relevant are liberal democrats and labour.
- 5.10 SL I think we should keep the politics out of it. We invite the Councillors.
- 5.11 CG if you don't invite them all, you won't get a job of scrutiny in seeing what's going on.
- 5.12 SL can we leave this in abeyance. Can we agree we invite all councillors and lets see who turns up. Forum agreed by vote to invite all councillors.
- 5.13 SL can we charge you CG with contacting Homes For Islington and being our voice, if anything more comes out then you can be the link.
- 5.14 SJ – I can meet up with Chris.
- 5.15 SL when people come to the Forum, Forum members can make an enquiry and we will follow it up. Partners will treat our enquiries like enquiries from members of the Council.

## 6. Works Team Update

- 6.1 LV – asked if anyone had any feedback / suggestions for changes.
- 6.2 SL – anything positive needs changing please let Liz know.
- 6.3 CG – pointed out that the descriptions "maple and beech" in the kitchen brochure might get people's hopes up. LV confirmed she would review this – perhaps change it to "maple effect".
- 6.4 LV – it was pointed out at the last meeting by Georgina, perhaps we should notify people when we intend to take the scaffolding will be taken down.
- 6.5 Shirley B – scaffolding has been up for four weeks. Nothing has been done. LV – I do know that your survey has actually been done. There was a ladder issue and the external supervisor was off sick. But survey done now and work should start soon.

CG

SJ

Forum

LV

LV

- 6.6 SL – there was the guttering / downpipe issue. Liz has confirmed that this is done as a standard part of the works. (tabled a paper showing an example of a works order including the guttering / down pipe is being flushed through).
- 6.7 CG commented about debris coming off the scaffolding as it comes down – guttering clearance should happen as the scaffold comes down. LC commented that she does have to deal with some complaints about this issue.
- 6.8 CG – there was an issue about people potentially losing cupboard space when their kitchen is refurbished. You can find yourself short of space. LV – these are the guidelines as to the minimum.
- 6.9 SL – in practice sometimes people get less space than what they had before. We wanted a clause in there to say we will endeavour to put the same amount of cupboard space as you had before. CP – you can't always put the same back because there are stricter health and safety standards than there were before.
- 6.10 SL said that Liz Voss is very open – you can always email Liz Voss directly – she's very good at responding. It helps my life if you go direct to Liz. She's very good at coming to a conclusion.

**Additional item: Leasehold questions (to be put in RF enquiries)**

- A1 Susan Haskins – have to pay buildings insurance and property insurance. Two years ago, LBI did works above. Since had 4 floods in the last 2 years. HFI plumber said there was nothing wrong. The fourth flood, another plumber found bath had been positioned differently and was causing floods. Told had to pay through own insurance though it is LBI's fault. Wrote to John Holman – should not have to pay. Letter never arrived. Kimberly, repairs e-mailed, make a claim within 60 days, £100 excess. Repairs in your home is your responsibility. Does LBI have a grudge against leaseholders? What should I do? Not right that I should pay where the plumber employed by LBI got it wrong.
- A2 JV – I will look at your case for you.
- A3 Khalid Waheed (observer) raised concerns about the accuracy of the final accounts he received. If tenants saw the list of what was done they might pick up omissions. How is the final bill arrived at after major works? One final reduced down from 31k to 18k. Concern is where there are no leaseholders, tenants won't complain because they don't know what has happened. Items listed in the final account not done e.g. front wall built, rebuilt and repointed. Who

LV

pays in the end? Some damage can be caused by the contractors themselves e.g. flooding where plumbing not correctly.

- A4 John Venning – United House has priced for doing the whole refurbishment, so United House takes the risk on costs.
- A5 Khalid Waheed (observer) – Raised concerns about the accuracy of the final accounts he received. If tenants saw the list of what was done they might pick up omissions. The contractor will charge you.
- A6 SL - Can Partners come back on this next time. Thanks to leaseholders for coming.

## 7. Repairs Audit

- 7.1 SL I got some complaints at the fun day. There are supposed to be someone who goes around and checks them once the decs have been done.
- 7.2 There is a young lady who is here today who has documented what happened in her case. If I hadn't seen the photos I wouldn't have believed it.
- 7.3 R Mills – I will have to look into that particular case and report back.
- 7.4 SL another issue has come up is lifecycle. When there are certain jobs which are over a certain cost they get referred to John Venning. Something has to be done with Rydon procedure. It seems to be repairs that residents complain about. If you send a contractor out to do a job, and there is a problem of damage, why don't they report it immediately – so that it's dealt with. For example if scaffolding poles cause damage.
- 7.5 JV If we get the details on each one we look into what has happened on each case.
- 7.6 CG claims for damage should not be put to insurance. The contractor should put right the damage or pay for the damage.
- 7.7 MA if we take this on in our complaints system. Lets make it a policy issue in Partners. The complaints system needs to be on the agenda.
- 7.8 SL suggested a meeting between herself, Partners Repairs Team and John Venning, Asset Manager.

RM

JV

JV

