

Specialist Advisory Panel – Home Owners Notes

Date of Meeting: Monday 27 September 2021

Attending

Name	Title
Johanna Winch	Customer Involvement Officer
Steven Martin	Customer Involvement Officer
Helen Bowerbank	Leaseholder Specialist
11 Residents	Across Southern Housing Groups' regions

This was the second meeting with members of the Home Owners Group who form part of the Specialist Advisory Panels within the Resident Involvement Structure. The purpose of the meeting was to explore the recommendations received from all the Specialist Advisory meetings and identify their 3 priorities. The meeting was also an opportunity for residents to meet the Groups' Leaseholder Specialist.

During the meeting it was clear that Home Owners had a number of concerns regarding building and fire safety and the meeting focus on listening and understanding their concerns and priorities.

The recommendations will be shared with the meeting notes provided below.

Agenda item	Feedback from panel
1.1 Meet the Groups' Leaseholder Specialist	The Groups' Leaseholder Specialist gave an overview of her role which started on 1 July 2021 which is to look at the service Southern Housing Group (SHG) are currently delivering to leaseholders. The first part of this is to listen to residents as well as collecting data from SHG, including looking at complaints, the issues and areas for improvement.

Agenda item	Feedback from panel
1.1	<p>The following themes were identified by Home Owner attendees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EWS1 and Section 20's – for blocks under 18 meters, stand back and review change in Government advice • Section 20's should not be sent as blanket costs for different size blocks in different areas • Communication not improving from the Group about Building Safety • Single point of contact for locations required – service charges, questions about block safety • Generic section 20's causing concern for small blocks. • What legal routes have Southern Housing Group looked to take?
1.1	<p>The following priorities were identified by the Leaseholder Specialist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating about forthcoming works - the costs, impacts from costs. • Plan ahead with residents • Know what needs doing and if there is a delay, what the impact will be on other planned works • The impact of the invoice when it is received by a residents • The need to shape building Safety communications and the relationships of departments within SHG
1.1	<p>Concern was raised regarding External Managing Agent (EMA) and building safety, they have also tried to get freeholder to do something. The building is under 18 meters but 7 storeys and so in a middle category. What can the Group do for us as a landlord with unreliable EMA's?</p> <p>The Leaseholder Specialist explained the way SHG work with EMA's at the moment is fragmented. Building Safety work on safety, Home Service Managers (HSM's) manage day to day and service charge team on services charges, thereby lacking an overall oversight. SHG are investigating having a contract manager who will build a relationship with EMA's holding them to account and manages the contracts.</p> <p>Also investigating how we can improve service charges from day 1 by being clearer how we set service charges from the beginning. How we communicate this to residents moving in.</p>

Agenda item	Feedback from panel
1.1	<p>Home Owners expressed their willingness to build relationship between them and SHG as many issues come back to being a dysfunctional relationship. SHG need to be clear what they want from us. We are feeling we are an obstacle / nuisance, and the tone of the communications has not been a partnership and wanting to get together to find a solution. The power and tone of section 20 department leaves residents feeling we're just going to do it. Until this is acknowledged then this is just another way to share information, nothing will be done.</p> <p>Leaseholder Specialist explained they are often made to feel a nuisance and are often told they (Leaseholder Specialist) is stopping the works. There is a process; section 20 letter and then consultation. We need to be talking to residents explaining where something needs to be done and why.</p> <p>Single point of contact is important, and this will be explored.</p>
1.1	<p>Home Owners expressed concern that the section 20 letters are too full of jargon and make it hard to understand. Residents have to go above and beyond to google and research what is meant in the letter and building safety. The consultation invitation is buried in the section 20 letter and when you do email or write no responses are received.</p> <p>Section 20 letter are set out in legislation and the words must be used in an exact way. Agree there should be a simple format but the problem is how it is set down in law and we cannot change it. Links to using a single point of contact.</p>
1.1	<p>Home Owners stated that it seemed that the same section 20 letter was sent out to multiple developments, without stating what part of it would apply to each development. It wasn't understood why there are not specialised people in the developments who would be able to tailor answers to questions.</p> <p>Resident state they are terrified. It is not emotion, it's fear. The work has already been done in terms of the surveys. Monteagle Way came together and sent a letter signed by 26 of us, sent 8 September 2021 with the consultation to be close on 16 September 2021. No acknowledgement has been received regarding our concerns. At least acknowledge instead of saying it will be done in a Q&A. That is not good enough, SHG need to speak to people at their own particular developments. It is not understood why only one member of</p>

Agenda item	Feedback from panel
	<p>staff can respond and not have team of people to support in responding. Why is the cost of £1,750 for a survey at multiple schemes across SHG? It is shocking the lack of level of communication.</p> <p>Letter had been received in the summer that SHG were going to do the test regarding combustible behind brick and then nothing else was going to be done. Another Home Owner explained they were told they wouldn't get section 20, and then received one.</p> <p>Leaseholder Specialist will investigate why residents seemed to have received the same letter and cost across the geography. SHG are procuring a contractor, but it seems that SHG need to explain estimated costs more clearly.</p>
<p>1.1</p>	<p>The Head of Building Safety spoke to the Multi Storey Living Property and Building Safety Managers (BSM) are allocated to different High-Rise blocks. Microsites are being provided. Now the BSM assigned they have become a frequent visitor to the estate, attends meetings and answers emails.</p> <p>Resident felt the Building Safety Team are over worked. They are often on the road, and it was suggested that they need someone to do the admin as it was acknowledged they are going through unnecessary workloads.</p> <p>Resident stated Building Safety is terrifying and is keeping them up at night. Reading through EWS1 process there are lots of areas that have some combustible material. The Head of Building Safety, when resident managed to speak to them, did answer many questions and does seem to be doing their best.</p> <p>Building Safety is huge and is affecting everyone in the country with potential to be life destroying. This should be on the agenda for everyone.</p> <p>The Leaseholder Specialist explained SHG has an incredibly conscientious Director of building safety, with BSM's in place before other many other organisations, but in other ways we are behind. Communications is the area SHG need to get better in supporting residents with.</p>

Agenda item	Feedback from panel
1.1	<p>Residents explained they are shocked to hear a blanket response was sent to residents from different size buildings with different make up. These letters are causing residents stress and anxiety and there is a concern that SHG are not understanding the impact they are having on residents and their mental health. Residents requested immediate steps by SHG giving breakdowns per building.</p>
1.1	<p>Resident stated one of the letters said, as a point of a principle, 'the availability of funding will never play into proceeding of works', which sounds sensible as safety first. This does not really align with cost benefit approach of doing work. The Government is trying to backtrack on the need to undertake works on buildings under 18 meters. Experts say fires in dwellings all time low and in blocks very low. If you compare minuscule risk of death in blocks of traditional constructions and 100,000 lives being damaged by financial imposition, then doesn't stand up practically or morally.</p> <p>There has to be a difference in how leaseholders are dealt with. Resident explained they live in a concrete block, and they don't think they will perish in it. SHG is ploughing ahead, and residents were not sure if SHG being first of the block is helpful as the advice and guidance around Fire Safety is still being debated. If there is one thing the resident would like to be fed back it is, why are we pressing ahead with this so urgently when things might change.</p> <p>The Leaseholder Specialist explained that other organisations have stopped doing EWS1 under 18 meters and refused to do them. Residents have been asking for EWS1 and mortgage lenders have been insisting on it, but the Government are not pushing for it. Organisations are starting to push back and say according to guidance, it is not required and giving text/wording to residents to explain to lenders why they are not issuing them.</p> <p>It was reiterated Fire Risk Assessments must be undertaken.</p>

Agenda item	Feedback from panel
1.1	<p>Resident asked how much responsibility SHG takes as properties were sold to residents as safe but now, they are not. Are SHG chasing builders wherever possible? There is a 15-year grace for builders where you can go back and get money from them. Residents had zero confidence that anyone from SHG has gone developers. Have SHG instructed legal representatives on behalf of residents to look at costs.</p> <p>Leaseholder Specialist explained this is the issue across the country. SHG paid contractors and inspectors to 'sign off' properties and SHG will be going back to developers to address where possible. It is a huge problem across the country.</p>
1.1	<p>Residents were asked for their priorities for Home Owners:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fire and Building Safety to include risk assessments, why the current pace from SHG and the lack of response to residents' queries 2. Single Point of Contact including clearer communications for Section 20 letters and consultation process 3. Financial impact including clearer breakdown for service charges.
Actions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send the notes and recommendations from the first meeting to new attendees • Confirm HSM at Elizabeth Hart Court, Surrey • Next meeting to be held before December and move start time to 6.30 / 7pm
Suggested Agenda items by Home Owners	Building and Fire Safety
What happens next	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Customer Involvement Team will review the feedback and recommendations • This document will be shared with the Resident Scrutiny Group and the directorates below • Potential times and dates for the next panel meeting will be shared with these notes and recommendations with all residents interested in the Home Owners

Specialist Advisory Panel – Home Owners Recommendation Plan

Date of Meeting: Monday 27 September 2021

Teams: Please consider the recommendations made by residents below. Please refer to the plan in conjunction with the notes reference and the glossary at the bottom of the plan. The themes entered may change based on the findings of the project team and service appointed to respond.

Directorate:							
Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team <i>(Indicate Team)</i>	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
1.1	Consistency in communications and responses from Building Safety Team: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of email response from team and does the team need and 'admin' to support team • Service Centre unable to answer queries 	Be Accountable – Listen to and take appropriate action Be Transparent – communicate with residents on the things that are important to them	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability Listen to our residents and customers	System - the systems the Group use to process data, tasks and communications	Leaseholder Specialist		

Directorate:							
Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team <i>(Indicate Team)</i>	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting with some resident and not others Attending the Multi-Storey Living Panel 						
1.1	Explored single point of contact to support clear communications between Southern Housing Group and Home Owners.	Be Transparent – communicate with residents on the things that are important to them	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability Listen to our residents and customers	System - the systems the Group use to process data, tasks and communications	Leaseholder Specialist		
1.1	Investigate why residents seem to have received the same section 20 letter with £1,750 cost for survey	Be Transparent – communicate with residents on the things that are important to them	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability	System - the systems the Group use to process data, tasks and communications	Leaseholder Specialist		
1.1	Explore undertaking consultations with residents before sending communications	Be Transparent – communicate with residents on the things that are important to them	Listen to our residents and customers	System - the systems the Group use to process data, tasks and communications	Leaseholder Specialist		

Directorate:							
Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team (Indicate Team)	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
1.1	Explore where residents can find out if their building is under 18 meters.	Be Transparent – communicate with residents on the things that are important to them	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability	System - the systems the Group use to process data, tasks and communications	Leaseholder Specialist		
1.1	Explore clarity on how residents can find out what is in their sinking fund	Be Accountable – Listen to and take appropriate action	Listen to our residents and customers	System - the systems the Group use to process data, tasks and communications	Leaseholder Specialist		
1.1	Requested clarity on section 20 letters as 'per resident' is ambiguous and misinterpreted causing anxiety and stress	Be Transparent – communicate with residents on the things that are important to them	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability Listen to our residents and customers	System - the systems the Group use to process data, tasks and communications	Leaseholder Specialist		

Glossary

Directorate (Area of Group)	Teams responsible for				
Customer Service	Triathlon	Building Safety	Customer operations	Home and property	Community investment and care
Development and Growth	Comms and external affairs	New business	Development and delivery	Sales and marketing	Strategy and policy
Commercial	Estate Services	SHG Construction	Commercial property and private rent	SMS (Maintenance Service)	Business change
Resources	Service charge	Governance	IT	Financial	HR/ Learning and Development

Themes

Training - individual, department, Group, Contractor

Process - the A to B day to day guidance behind a policy

Policy - the outline of the Group's commitments

System - the systems the Group use to process data, tasks and communications

Community - work undertaken by teams to support communities

Summary of Groups' Corporate Plan

Increase our income and decrease costs

Deliver value for money through digital service

Build greater trust, transparency and accountability

Invest in our homes, strengthen our communities

Listen to our residents and customers

Empower our people

Resident Involvement Strategy Commitments

Show Respect – value residents and that their views matter

Be Accountable – Listen to and take appropriate action

Work Together – embed co-creation across the Group

Be Inclusive – provide right opportunities to allow residents to influence services and have their say

Be Transparent – communicate with residents on the things that are important to them