

Specialist Advisory Panel – Home Owners Meeting Notes

Date of Meeting: Thursday 15 April 2021

Attending

Who attended	
Johanna Winch	Customer Involvement Officer
Steve Martin	Customer Involvement Officer
Kerry Clare	Customer Involvement Manager
How many attended Zoom meeting	10

This was the first 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 feedback received from the Home Owners survey in 2020. This survey clearly identified communications from the Southern Housing Group is a concern for residents.

The feedback from the survey has been shared with Housing Managers and the Service Charge Project Lead. They supported exploring Communications wider with the Home Owners Group understand the issues affecting residents and begin to explore suggested solutions.

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

1	Agenda item	Feedback from panel
1.1	Call Centre	<p>As Home Owners, we know what we are responsible for. Call Centre staff seem uncertain as to who is responsible for what and we often have to tell them. We regularly have to refer to lease agreement to explain responsibilities to Contact Centre.</p> <p>Contact Centre staff should have access to this information so that they can assist and direct our enquiry to the right person. If they are unable to do this why can we not speak directly to the correct team to get the matter resolved and who should this be?</p>

1	Agenda item	Feedback from panel
		<p>There does not appear to be any cohesion or communications between teams – Contact Centre staff, HSM, Building Safety, Estate Care, etc</p> <p>Advised that using Contact Centre means calls are logged however despite confirmation that Contact Centre has emailed person / department, no response received.</p> <p>At times Home Owners do know who to speak to but matter still not resolved. Difficulty speaking to staff about fire safety, major works, etc</p>
1.2	Service Charges / Financial implications	<p>Home Owners often only find out that work is taking place that affects their home and estate when they receive Section 20 notice or after the fact when cost of works have been added to service charges.</p> <p>This practice does not allow residents the opportunity to influence or provide feedback on works being considered as part of the procurement process in a pro-active manner. It can also cause financial hardship as they are unable to plan for costs when these are unknown or not anticipated.</p> <p>Request for transparency about costs being added to service charges. A lot of costs are put onto the Home Owners and they would like to receive regular communication about these including a breakdown of costs.</p> <p>Service charges are estimated and have unexplained charges.</p> <p>Concern were raised that Home Owners pay for other works on mixed tenure estates.</p> <p>Home Owners have no ability to influence work or service charge - just have to believe and accept.</p> <p>Homeowner advised that they could scrutinise invoices and advised they can seek support of the Leaseholder Advisory Service or MP.</p>

1	Agenda item	Feedback from panel
		<p>Request transparency around reserve funds. Payments to this have increased and is treated like it is a 'state secret'. Cannot log into the account to find out about the reserve fund.</p> <p>Home Owners are unable to plan for works as they rely on SHG to undertake assessments which they do without involving residents or being transparent about forecasting work.</p>
1.3	Planned Works communication	<p>Often Home Owners will only find out about work taking place when contractors turn up on site.</p> <p>Find it difficult to get communication/information on timescales for work to take place.</p> <p>Section 20 communication – understand the need for receiving legal documentation however there is too much paperwork to take in and understand regarding the process.</p> <p>Home Owners would like to be involved in talking to Southern Housing Group before any work is planned and either going through procurement or being notified at S20.</p> <p>Face to face conversations (personally or digitally) to understand what work is needed, why and what options there are (fire door adjustments vs door replacement). This will benefit SHG as residents can share prior knowledge of works already taken place.</p> <p>Communications are quite stressful as a homeowner. Tone of letters can be quite frightening - this is going to happen without any opportunity to discuss or without financial support/advice being offered.</p> <p>Different options and choices available depending on if you are a leaseholder or a freeholder.</p> <p>There is no paperwork to confirm if parts of the building are certified i.e. windows therefore SHG replace as there is no alternative.</p> <p>Where does the decision lie when drawing up plans for estates SHG or HSM?</p>

1	Agenda item	Feedback from panel
1.4	Fire Safety / Risk Assessments	<p>Communication regarding building/fire works – no transparency about work being undertaken. Conflicting information from SHG, other organisations and fire service and unable to get questions answered.</p> <p>Difficult to keep up with volume of communication which are causing anxiety and stress to Home Owners.</p> <p>Backlog for fire doors to be fitted up to 3 to 6 months.</p> <p>Queried if contributing to major works but responsible for own doors, are we therefore not paying twice?</p> <p>Why are Home Owners incurring costs for surveyors to draw up building plans when properties are relatively new? Why to SHG not already have these and why are these not being shared?</p> <p>Fire Risk Assessments can be requested via the Contact Centre.</p>
1.5	Managing Agents	<p>Information sharing between SHG and Managing Agents.</p> <p>Managing agents in some situations make decisions and ignore emails.</p> <p>If power is with Managing Agent, can they be overruled, what is the situation.</p>
1.6	Website	<p>Webpages need to be relevant to estate as currently too generalised</p>
1.7	Complaint Process	<p>Complaints request has been made but no response. Kerry Clare to follow up.</p> <p>There is a new complaints process and more information can be found here: Complaints and compliments (shgroup.org.uk)</p> <p>Contact centre can log service dissatisfaction or complaint. Complaints can also be made by email or via website.</p>

1	Agenda item	Feedback from panel
1.8	Building Safety Managers	Discussion as to whether Stamford Group and Lewis Gardens have Building Safety Managers. Steve Martin to check
1.9	Working from home	<p>When can residents speak directly to or meet with their housing representative. Many are agile workers and normally would be visible on the estates.</p> <p>Concern only able to contact staff by email as Contact Centre are unable to transfer call.</p>
1.10	Communications	<p>No willingness to share information, more need to know basis</p> <p>When receiving a letter feels like what now, what have I got to pay for now. Decisions made already, here is the cost. Work starting or only find out when contractor turns up.</p> <p>Communication and engagement with residents prior to Section 20. SHG do send section 20 they do not engage with residents about they work they are doing and whether residents support this.</p> <p>No joined up communications, Southern replaced all the fire doors the year before last – no communication to residents or about damage to other areas.</p> <p>How was the decision made – massive contract for rubbish collection? Was it just made HSM re fly tipping?</p> <p>No sharing of information. No differentiation between leaseholders and social housing tenants.</p>
1.11	Collaboration with Sanctuary	<p>Home Owners raised concern regarding this collaboration</p> <p>It was confirmed due diligence is being undertaken and communications will be sent out soon.</p> <p>More information about Sanctuary Housing can be found on their own website</p>

1	Agenda item	Feedback from panel
1.12	Where do Home Owners look for information	
		<p>Will try to get in touch with HSM but this is often difficult for a number of reasons – no call back, availability of HSM, etc. Often unable to get a response within 5 days.</p> <p>Forums for where Home Owners live</p> <p>Drop-in surgeries with officers on estate</p> <p>Project Manager meetings before works are undertaken to ensure consultations take place.</p> <p>It was felt information is given by piecemeal and not the whole picture with communication not being clear. Timely responses following calling Contact Centre</p> <p>If leaseholder do not live at the property, information often goes to property address and not direct to leaseholder and therefore Home Owners end up missing information.</p> <p>Send letters as PDF via emails as well as letters in post. Can we opt out of post?</p> <p>HSM cover when on annual leave. Home Owners were reassured there should always be cover and the Area Service Manager (ASM) would be able to inform who is covering.</p> <p>Would like to see more zoom meetings either by estate or one to one. Ad-hoc zoom meetings locally with HSM and SHG officers or departments. There is low participation face to face and during the day due to many having children, evening zoom meetings may make it easier for engagement.</p>

1	Agenda item	Feedback from panel
1.13	<p>Next Steps – Working with the staff panel and communicating with the group</p>	<p>Owners were asked to think about how they would like these meeting to work going forward. This can be given now or send suggestions to Johanna Winch after the meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Owners requested these meetings are held bi-monthly • Would like to meet with someone and speak to someone on this platform about fire doors • Have a separate group for Fire Safety • EWS1 form – link to more information on the webpage Leaseholders who want to sell, re-mortgage or staircase (shgroup.org.uk) • Separate Building and Fire and Safety Group may be helpful • Suggestions for future meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How can SHG help Home Owners save money? ○ Formalised minutes and actions? • Resident Scrutiny Group has a role within the group to gather views from Home Owners on a scrutiny project. Communications can also come from Home Owners as scrutiny suggestions to the Resident Scrutiny Group. How would members like this to work? A standing agenda item or by invite only?

2	Agenda item	Next Actions
2.1	<p>Feedback following meeting by email</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions at the start of the meeting to include geography and tenure of attendees. Would this be something attendees would agree to do? • Southern Housing to provide the floor plans for each block at Lewis Gardens and a list of the building materials used in construction to the external consultants carrying out the fire risk assessment and external wall survey (these are work items 3 and 4 in the “Description of Work” in the letter sent to Lewis Gardens residents on 31 March 2021)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overriding concern of Home Owners is that we are charged for unnecessary work or duplication of existing work. Put in place processes to “catch” potential duplication or unnecessary work at an early stage to save both Southern Housing and residents unnecessary costs. • Concern “one size fits all” policies have been adopted across all Southern Housing properties, which were not needed or required for some. Particularly concerned to avoid this happening again with the recent post-Grenfall cladding requirements applying to buildings over 18m and are extremely worried that Southern Housing may accidentally commission work that is not required by law. • Avoid the mistakes of the past, where vastly expensive fire safety work has been carried out without resident’s consent (on top of the excessively costly annual fire safety inspections that are paid for through our service charge). Some schemes are marketed to key workers, and for many, even a few hundred pounds of extra service charge may tip them into debt. Residents are particularly financially vulnerable now, because of the covid pandemic. • Hoping the new focus group will give a new impetus to working to control costs and save Southern Housing and its Home Owners money when carrying out essential fire safety work.
2.2	Suggested Agenda for next meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradual Staircasing and 990-year Lease Extensions
2.2	What happens next	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange next meeting • Sharing the feedback with the Resident Scrutiny Group and teams within the group to consider the recommendations shared <p>Ask for Terms and Reference/Code of Conduct agreements not yet returned to be returned/agreed to</p>

Specialist Advisory Panel – Home Owners Recommendation Plan

Date of Meeting: 15 April 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: Customer Service							
Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team <i>(Indicate Team)</i>	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
1.1	Contact Centre staff to ensure they are clear on what residents' responsibility and SHGL responsibilities are so they can direct residents' enquiry correctly.	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process	Customer Operations		
1.1	Contact Centre staff have access to estate information and works planned to include team responsible to direct resident enquiries correctly	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process	Customer Operations		

Directorate: Customer Service

Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team <i>(Indicate Team)</i>	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
1.1	Contact staff to be aware of contractors working on estate i.e. lift contractor to direct resident enquiries correctly	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process	Customer Operations		
1.1	Explore how messages are passed to other departments and are followed up on in a timely manner.	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process	Customer Operations		
1.3	Explore a platform for residents to access to find out what work is planned or taking place on their estate with details of contractor and when they are due on site.	Communication	Listen to our residents	System	Home and Property		
1.3	Explore meeting with residents before procurement process to explain what is being procured, timelines,	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process	Home and Property		

Directorate: Customer Service

Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team <i>(Indicate Team)</i>	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
	communications and financial costs						
1.3	Consider resident involvement in procurement process for planned works including building safety	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process	Home and Property		
1.3	Explore documentation retention for building parts certifications. Unable to find certificates resulting works carried out as not known what is certified.	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process	Home and Property		
1.3	Explore clearer process for sharing information in a timely manner before decisions are made to ensure Homeowners are part of the decision-making/procurement process.	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process	Home and Property		

Directorate: Customer Service

Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team <i>(Indicate Team)</i>	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
1.3	Explore clearer communication before section 20 letters are sent	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process	Home and Property		
1.3	Have a point of contact for projects / works	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process	Home and Property		
1.4	Explore communications regarding any work being undertaken and reasons why. Give homeowners an opportunity to communicate/speak to staff regarding works.	Communication, Voice and Influence	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers	System, Process	Building Safety		
1.4	Review volume of communication and co-ordinate across SHG to include all work taking place on estate/in home regardless of team leading.	Communication	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers	System, Process	Building Safety		

Directorate: Customer Service

Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team <i>(Indicate Team)</i>	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
1.4	Ensure building plans and risk assessments are available for Homeowners	Communication	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers	System, Process	Building Safety		
1.4	Explore clearer communications on who is responsible for decisions regarding estate plans	Communication	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers	System, Process	Building Safety		
1.4	Explore clearer process for sharing information in a timely manner before decisions are made to ensure Homeowners are part of the decision-making/procurement process.	Communication, Voice and Influence	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers	System, Process	Building Safety		

Directorate: Customer Service

Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team <i>(Indicate Team)</i>	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
1.4	Have a point of contact for projects / works	Communication, Voice and Influence	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers	System, Process	Building Safety		
1.10	Explore clarity on how decisions are made regarding contracts affecting estates of mixed tenure i.e. fly tipping.	Communication, Respect	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers	Process, System	Home and Property		
1.10	Explore dispelling the perception that to SHG there is no differentiation between leaseholders and social housing tenants when sharing information.	Communication, Respect	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers	Process, System	Home and Property		
1.5	Explore clearer communications regarding decision	Communication, Voice and Influence	Build greater trust,	System, Process	Helen Bowerbank		

Directorate: Customer Service

Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team <i>(Indicate Team)</i>	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
	making when managing agents are involved		transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers				
1.5	Clarify if power is with Managing Agent, can they be overruled, what is the situation.	Voice and Influence	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers	System, Process	Helen Bowerbank		

Directorate: Resources

Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team <i>(Indicate Team)</i>	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
1.2	Involve / inform Homeowners of work costs before being added to service charge	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process and System	Financial		

Directorate: Resources							
Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team <i>(Indicate Team)</i>	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
1.2	Communicate a plan of works (from across the whole of SHG) which identify large costs for Homeowners to enable them to plan financially rather than when receive S20 notice or contractors turning up on the estates / schemes.	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process and System	Financial		
1.2	Explore how service charges can be more transparent which will also address concerns that Homeowners pay for works for other tenures	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process and System	Financial		
1.2	Explore how Homeowners can have information on reserve funds possibly through Homeowners online account	Communication	Listen to our residents	Process and System	Financial		

Directorate: Development and Growth							
Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team <i>(Indicate Team)</i>	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
1.6	Review webpages and explore how information can be shared more locally via the webpage or other platforms	Communication	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers	Process, System	Comms and External Affairs		
1.9	Explore concerns regarding only able to contact staff by email as Contact Centre are unable to transfer call.	Communication, Respect	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers	Process, System	Comms and External Affairs		
1.10	Explore joined up communications between departments i.e. fire doors replaced 2 years ago and now reviewing fire safety updates which may include upgrading fire doors.	Communication, Respect	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers	Process, System	Comms and External Affairs		
1.10	Send letters as PDF via emails as well as letters in post. Can	Communication, Respect	Build greater trust,	Process, System	Comms and External Affairs		

Directorate: Development and Growth							
Ref	Resident Recommendation	Link to RI Strategy	Link to Corporate Plan	Theme	Lead/Team <i>(Indicate Team)</i>	Actions/Feedback	Timescale
	residents opt out of post?		transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers				
1.11	Confirm when resident will receive further communication about collaboration	Communication, Respect	Build greater trust, transparency and accountability. Listen to our residents and customers	Process, System	Comms and External Affairs		

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

Resident Involvement Strategy

Respect - listen, visibility, ownership

Communication - clear, accessible, timely

Voice and Influence - making decisions together

Quality homes - well maintained, safe, well managed

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