

PBHA FORUM / RENT CONSULTATION

Wednesday 21st February 2018 at Isledon Canteen

Present: Vanessa Morris, Director of Services
Alex Daddey, Incomes Officer
10 tenants

Chair JW
Minutes MH

Minutes of the previous Forum held on 23 January 2018 have been published on the PB website but were not available at the meeting. Therefore there were no matters arising.

1. RENT CONSULTATION

- Service Charge

Vanessa explained there are two types of service charge. Eligible service charge is paid by housing benefit if tenants are on this benefit. Ineligible service charge is paid by individual tenants to Peter Bedford and is the charge for gas, electricity and water.

This year there are less changes in the amount of service charge than previous years. Across the board, some tenants have had a slight decrease, some have stayed the same and some a slight increase of 1-2%. A tenant commented their service charge increase was 6.5% and therefore did not fit this picture.

A tenant said their understanding of the eligible service charge is that it is based on the actual costs that Peter Bedford pays for services in each property and that it is divided equally amongst the tenants living in the property. Vanessa said in principle this is the case. However, there are anomalies in service charges at Peter Bedford and work was done last year by Peter Bedford to bring more fairness to the service charges payable by tenants.

A tenant made the general point that it is difficult to engage in the Rent Consultation process without the necessary information. That is a service charge breakdown for the proposed service charge to compare with the current service charge breakdown. Without it, it is not possible to have an informed discussion.

PB is currently updating the Property Information leaflet. It will give a clearer and more comprehensive guide to the service charges. The idea in development is that service charges will be put into bands based on actual costs. This information will help both staff and tenants understand the services provided under the service charge.

A tenant can request their service charge breakdown from Alex Daddey, Incomes Officer. PB legally have 28 days to meet the tenants's request.

Alex Daddey will be at Isledon Canteen every Tuesday and Clissold Hub every Thursday to deal with any individual queries regarding rent accounts.

- Universal Credit

The timeframe for universal credit being rolled out is:

New claimants (i.e. people applying first time for benefits) and change of circumstances (e.g. if you become ill and cannot apply for jobs)

Islington	20 June 2018
Hackney	October 2018

Tenants already on benefits will be transferred to Universal Credit between 2019 - 2022

So for any tenant already on benefits, unless there is a change in their circumstances, they will not be put on Universal Credit until next year at the earliest.

The actual date is being discussed at government level and their decision is not yet known. If you want to keep up to date you can do so through the Forums and articles in the Rising Star.

Universal credit Focus Groups held in January identified that tenants's main concern is that they did not want the responsibility of paying their own rent. Under the current system housing benefit pay rent direct to Peter Bedford. Under universal credit rent will be paid to the individual and it will be their responsibility to pay their rent to Peter Bedford.

Vanessa is raising the concerns of both Peter Bedford and tenants in meetings with the DWP.

There will be focussed classes on the skills tenants will need for Universal Credit. For example, computer skills to fill in the form as all applications have to be made online, setting up a necessary email address, opening a bank account and budgeting as universal credit is paid monthly into a bank account.

- **Window Cleaning**

New contractors have been appointed to clean the communal windows in properties. They have written to tenants and will be visiting them. If you have not had a letter then you will not be receiving this service. No service charge was made last year for communal window cleaning as no contractors had been appointed.

- **Communal Cleaning**

Tenants said that there have been gaps in the service, some as long as 2-3 months. Not all properties have a signing sheet on their communal noticeboard to check the cleaning is being done each month. Vanessa will look into this. A tenant said they did not benefit from communal cleaning because they have a basement flat with a separate entrance.

Vanessa said that, in general, if any contractor is failing to do the work, tenants should report this to Repairs.

- **Landlords Utilities (Hubs)**

A tenant asked why tenants are paying for utilities in offices. Vanessa said that this element of service charge is for Isledon Canteen and Clissold Hub.

2. ISLEDON CANTEEN AND CLISSOLD HUB

Peter Bedford are taking specialist advice from City Bridge Trust who are carrying out an accessibility audit to look at access to these venues for anyone with mobility issues. PB will be fundraising to carry out the necessary adaptations identified by City Bridge Trust.

In April/May Peter Bedford will hold Focus Groups with tenants to get ideas on improving Isledon Canteen and Clissold Hub and how they are used. New fundraising will then be needed to implement the agreed action from the Focus Groups.

A tenant told Vanessa that Isledon Canteen is not being cleaned by the cleaners as they had been told it would be. Consequently volunteers working at the Canteen have to do all the cleaning, including the toilets, to ensure a clean communal space for tenants. Vanessa said she will look into this.

3. IT CLASSES

The IT classes, held in the dedicated training room at Kingsland Hub, are well attended and tenants have a good learning experience either learning how to use a computer for the first time or improving their IT skills. However, there are limited spaces for Islington tenants because the funding is from Hackney Learning Trust.

A tenant asked if the IT classes which used to be held at Isledon Canteen will be started again because not all tenants are able to travel to Kingsland Hub. Two tenants volunteered to support IT training at Isledon Canteen. Vanessa said that the WiFi problems at the Canteen have now been sorted. There are plans to have IT sessions at both Isledon Canteen and Clissold Hub.

A tenant asked about the recruiting external volunteers. Vanessa said that PB are looking into this through connecting with external agencies. A tenant asked if there is a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator and Vanessa responded that there is no one dedicated worker, different projects are managed by individual staff.

A tenant suggested approaching large organisations to source computers.

4. TOPCOATS

There was dissatisfaction from all tenants attending the meeting with the service and standard of repairs from Topcoats.

Vanessa explained that Topcoats were given a three year contract and it has two years left to run. The contract includes performance indicators and an annual review. Dispute and conflict resolution was also in the contract. Under the contract, Topcoats have a target of 80% to fix repairs at the first visit. They are also obliged to either give to a tenant or post a Satisfaction Feedback Form after each repair. So far, PB are getting these Feedback Forms for 50% of repairs. Every quarter, PB randomly selects tenants to ask their opinion on Topcoats.

No tenant at the Forum had ever been given a Satisfaction Feedback Form from Topcoats. After each visit, Topcoats does ask tenants to sign the job off. A tenant commented that, even if the repair is not up to standard, it would feel confrontational to refuse to sign. A tenant said they reported sub standard work to Lisa who then organised the work to be inspected by Topcoats. A tenant did not understand why it was Topcoats giving out Feedback Forms and not Peter Bedford.

Many tenants said that repairs were not fixed first time. A tenant said this was unfair to tenants who had to keep waiting at home in the long windows (8 am - 1pm or 1 pm - 5 pm) for repeat visits. A tenant also said it was unfair on Lisa Hutchings on the Repair Line because it increased her workload constantly having to rebook repairs which were not fixed first time and to sort out inspections on sub standard work.

5. FOCUSED FORUMS

Vanessa suggested that some Forums, say every two months, could focus on one topic such as repairs. A tenant said that the relevant staff for the topic should also attend the Forum.

6. NEW STAFF

Larnie Parker, Participation and Peer Support Officer, has been appointed. Her first month will be an induction and, during this month, she will send out letters to tenants introducing herself. Then her initial focus will be setting up PB's Timebank.

7. ISLEDON CANTEN AT THE WEEKENDS

Patrick and Carol, after many years of dedicated hard work running the Canteen at the weekend, have resigned as volunteers. Patrick will finish his voluntary work at the end of March. Vanessa is talking with two people who have expressed an interest in volunteering at the weekends.

Vanessa said there are ongoing discussions about the possibility of a weekly fresh food distribution to tenants.

8. WOMEN'S GROUP

Tracy, an Islington Support worker, will be re-establishing the Women's Group. The first Group will be at the end of March, date to be confirmed.

DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Rent Consultation Forum. Thursday 22 February 2018 12 noon - 1 pm at Kingsland Hub

Tenants's Forum. Wednesday 21 March 2018 3 pm at Clissold Hub