

# Cheltenham Borough Council Housing Services

## Leaseholder Panel – Meeting Minutes

**Location:** Hesters Way Community Resource Centre

**Date:** 25<sup>th</sup> Feb 2025

### **Present:**

6 leaseholders (names withheld for privacy)

### **Also attending:**

- Ellen Pollicott (Housing)
- Michelle Barnett (Housing)
- Matt Ward (Housing)

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Ellen Pollicott welcomed the panel, as well as Matt Ward, Head of Housing Services to the meeting

## **2. Introduction from Matt Ward**

- The government reduced the Right to Buy discount last year. To receive the maximum discount, applications had to be submitted by November 2024. As a result, three years' worth of applications were received within a two-week period.
- Government devolution will change the structure of councils into a district unitary authority. This transition is still to be determined but is expected to take effect in 2028. Cheltenham and Stroud are currently the only areas within Gloucestershire that manage their own housing stock, whereas other areas rely on housing associations.

## **3. Stock Condition Survey**

- A stock condition survey is currently being commissioned to assess all properties. The results will guide future asset management and investment with more detail, moving away from a "book-life" approach.
- Example: Roofs currently have a 60-year life cycle.
- Leaseholders should benefit from economies of scale when necessary work is undertaken.
- Leaseholders have requested access to stock condition surveys, as this information could align with the Section 20 process, giving greater insight into future planned works.

## **4. Section 20s**

- The Section 20 process is a legal requirement, and CBC has always adhered to it. Previous challenges have confirmed CBC's compliance with the legal framework.
- MW aims to improve communication regarding Section 20 notices and is working with the asset management team to enhance clarity on reasoning.
- Legal requirements dictate how notices must be worded. Additional steps, such as block meetings, can be introduced to explain the process further.
- Leaseholder teams will continue to advocate for transparency and justification of costs.
- Future Section 20 notices will include:
  - a) Justification for costs
  - b) Detailed breakdown of costs
  - c) Confirmation that the works have been inspected and deemed necessary
- Leaseholder forums will now include notifications of Section 20s, so the panel can hold us to accounts for transparency.
- Larger-scale works, such as windows and doors, will also be presented to the panel first for feedback.
- Leaseholder: Can Section 20 notices be published on the website?
- MW: This may be possible via a portal accessible to tenants and leaseholders, but this is a long term goal.

## **4. Asset management Strategy**

- CBC is developing a 30-year asset management strategy to outline necessary future works.
- The leaseholder team will ensure only necessary work, as specified in Section 20s, is included.
- MW has initiated an internal audit of Section 20s to examine contract procurement, management, and sign-offs at different stages (pre-inspection, during inspection, and post-inspection).
- Leaseholder: When will the asset management strategy be available?
- MW: Due to the current transition period, a timeline cannot yet be provided. However, interim solutions, such as discussing Section 20s in meetings and providing an overview of stock condition surveys to the leaseholder panel, will be implemented.

- Leaseholder: Can we see a sample of the stock condition survey to understand its contents?
- MB: Julian Denslow may be able to provide a sample for the panel to view.
- MW reassured attendees that no significant Section 20s are currently in the pipeline.

#### **4. Service charges and Payment Agreements**

- Leaseholder: Service charges are lower than most private rental properties.
- Leaseholder: However, this does not create a sinking fund.
- CBC offers flexible payment arrangements, including interest-free periods, to support leaseholders requiring additional time.
- Financial support teams are available to assist with budgeting concerns.

In extreme cases where leaseholders are unable to pay, CBC may consider buybacks but will always explore options to keep leaseholders in their homes, possibly through a local authority tenancy.

#### **5. Leaseholder Rights and management options**

- If all residents in a block have exercised their Right to Buy, they could theoretically purchase their lease from CBC. However, this would require setting up a management company, which is a complex and costly process.

#### **6. Leaseholder Handbook**

- The current leaseholder handbook is outdated and will undergo a review and update.
- The objective is to make the handbook electronically available in multiple languages with a search function, to ensure accessibility
- Initially, a quick refresh may be provided to align with the influx of Right to Buy applications.
- The updated handbook will be presented to the leaseholder panel for input. Initial input from the group suggests they just want a very functional and easy to use handbook.
- A paper copy will not be automatically sent to all leaseholders but will be provided upon request for those who need it.

#### **7. Actions and Next Steps**

Contact Julian Denslow to see how much we can share with leaseholders at this stage around asset management

## **Next Meeting**

- Date: TBC
- Time: 6–7:30 pm
- Place: Hesters Way Community Resource Centre