

Cheltenham Borough Council Housing Services

Leaseholder Panel – Meeting Minutes

Location: Hesters Way Community Resource Centre

Date: 8th July 2025

Present:

8 leaseholders (names withheld for privacy)

Also attending:

- Michelle Barnett (Housing)
- Liam Pem (Housing)

1. Review of minutes and introduction to action tracker

- The action tracker and minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed point by point.
- A member asked how final costs for works are calculated, particularly when leaseholders wish to query or compliment the quality of the work. It was clarified that leaseholders have the right to raise questions about the work carried out, and they will not be charged for any damage caused by contractors or repair staff.
- A question was raised regarding lease agreements: are all lease terms consistent across Cheltenham? It was confirmed that while most leases follow a standard format, there are a small number of properties with variations.
- **Action:** A copy of the updated lease document will be shared with the group.
- A concern was raised that when contacting housing services, the focus often appears to be on tenants, with limited reference to leaseholders.
- **Action:** Follow-up required with relevant teams to explore including clearer references to leaseholders in customer communications.
- A query was raised about how leaseholders can submit observations and whether this is restricted to post. It was confirmed that observations may also be submitted via email.
- **Action:** The relevant contact details will be circulated to all group members.

2. Council's communication with Leaseholders

- A member raised concerns about the clarity of Section 20 notifications and whether they can be more clearly communicated via email.

Action: Review existing letters and explore ways to make them clearer and more accessible across formats.

- It was suggested that communications should include more explicit references to leaseholders, particularly in opening lines, to ensure relevance is immediately clear.
- Concerns were expressed about the Leaseholder Portal's limited functionality, especially its lack of detail in breaking down charges.

Action: Explore opportunities for improving the portal

- A group member reported receiving a poorly worded repairs text message, which caused confusion. The need for clear, personalised, and well-timed communications was emphasised.
- Members stressed the importance of avoiding door knocking or text messages during sensitive times, such as the school run.
- Some members of the group agreed that combining a text message with a letter or follow-up phone call, delivered at an appropriate time, would be the most effective approach.
- It was noted that abbreviations in messages can cause confusion, especially for residents for whom English is not a first language. Clear, plain language should be prioritised.

3. Service Charges and value for money

- Members discussed the importance of understanding how service charges are calculated. Clarity on how to raise queries was emphasised as essential.
- The complexity of the procurement process was highlighted. Questions were raised about whether works could be delivered more cost-effectively. It was explained that costs provided at the Section 20 stage are estimates and may change once procurement is complete and final invoices are received.
- It was clarified that once works are signed off by the council as acceptable, the assumption is that the job meets required standards.
- Members were reminded that disputes about major works should be raised during the Section 20 consultation process.
- Leaseholders contribute only their portion of costs; the council covers its share.

- A suggestion was made about leaseholders painting communal areas themselves, but it was confirmed this is not permitted. However, concerns about poor workmanship, such as painting over chipped surfaces, should be raised directly. Leaseholders are encouraged to challenge work that falls below expected standards.
- An example was shared where communal entry doors were left not closing properly after works were completed, highlighting the need for better quality control.
- On service charges generally, members felt the system is mostly fair, though even small errors can cause concern. Some cleaning services were seen by some as good value for money. Members shared stories where it was not – they were told again to report it where the cleaning falls short of the expected standard.
- Ground rent was viewed as fair, and ad hoc repairs were largely considered reasonable.

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4. How can we better help leaseholders understand their rights

- Members suggested that access to a standard lease example would help leaseholders better understand their rights and responsibilities.

Action: Share a sample standard lease with the group.

Action: Research how other councils support leaseholder understanding of their leases.

- The group discussed ways to improve leaseholder awareness of their rights.

4. Feedback on new rent statements

- Mixed feedback was received on the new invoice format: some members preferred the old version, others felt the new version was an improvement, and one member had not yet seen it.

Action: Review both the new and old invoice formats and identify potential improvements for clarity and transparency.

5. Support, training and next steps for the group

- Members expressed interest in scrutiny training but emphasised the need for it to be engaging and accessible.
- It was suggested that practical examples should accompany discussion topics, for instance, sharing copies of letters from CBC to leaseholders in advance.
- A WhatsApp broadcast group was proposed to allow members to send agenda items or AOB suggestions directly to the facilitators.

Action: All discussion points and actions to be added to the action tracker and reviewed before the next meeting.

Action: Liam to collate feedback on the three key issues raised and develop proposed actions for review at the next meeting.