

Ealing Council Leaseholders Association (ECLA) Forum 5th June 2025, Greenford Hall

Minutes of Questions and Answer Session with Councilor Brett and senior Council officers

The ECLA Chair introduced the meeting with the following points:

- Thanked leaseholders, Councilor Brett and Council officers for attending the meeting.
- Thanked the Home Ownership team for organising the logistics around today's event.
- Explained the following regarding ECLA:
 - ECLA is a volunteer group which has existed for several years. ECLA works with the Council to improve services for leaseholders.
 - The association is only nine people strong, and these members form the current committee.
 - The main issue currently is that capacity is limited with just nine volunteers.
 - So far this year the group has input into the Leaseholder Handbook which the Council will soon publish, the Home Ownership Service Standards, and arranging this event.
 - The group has also chased the Council to share the results of the Leaseholder survey which happened in December and January.
 - Even though the group does not have the survey results yet, in its monthly meetings it has made a lengthy list of matters that we know are impacting leaseholders negatively.
 - Challenges include service charges, repairs, anti-social behaviour, security, major work, mold & damp, communication and engagement with the Council, value for money and holding the Council accountable. Many leaseholders are facing major challenges due to disrepair and costs which are significantly affecting their lives negatively.
 - Another issue is that our relationship with the Council is different to that of tenants for example there is no single point of contact. The Social Housing regulatory framework applies in the main to tenants, not leaseholders. As leaseholders our only recourse when the Council doesn't respond correctly is our lease as our contract with the council and possibly a legal route.

- For today's event the ECLA committee has formulated three questions to pose to Councilor Brett and senior officers.
- Responses to these three questions and survey results will help ECLA to formulate a work plan.
- Meeting protocols – please be respectful and courteous so that all can get value from the session.
- The questions and answers will be recorded today for minute taking and publishing on the Ealing Council website.

Rasheed Said - Head of Housing Income and Leasehold Services, introduced himself and made the following points:

- Will be concentrating on things that are working well that can be built up and on things that can be done better.
- Key will be to listen to leaseholders. To support this the council will have annual leaseholder surveys and meaningful action plans that follow the surveys and have the right panels in place. Action plans will be brought to ECLA as a group for meaningful discussions.
- Committed to the conversation with leaseholders being a two-way conversation.

The ECLA Chair then posed the three questions formulated by ELCA to Councilor Brett and Marco Pelazza.

QUESTION ONE - Service Charges have tripled in costs in the last three years. Can the Council explain this increase when services haven't improved or aren't being delivered to an acceptable standard?

Councilor Brett said the following:

- Thanked ECLA for inviting her to the event.
- It's important that she attends the event.
- It's important that she and the council reset their relationship with leaseholders.
- It's important that leaseholders lead on how they want the council to deliver services.

She then went on to answer the question with the following points:

- In terms of why service charges have gone up there are a mixture of issues that have come up which leaseholders will probably be quite familiar with.
- Inflation has risen significantly in the last three years.
- Energy crisis - costs have significantly increased and will be being felt by both individual households as well as blocks.

- Building insurance premiums have also significantly increased in the sector.
- The cost of repairs both in terms of materials and labour has also gone up massively.
- As a Council we estimate what the service charges should be and then we reconcile that at the end of the year.
- We found that we were undercharging significantly and have adapted accordingly going forward, which is why service charges have gone up.
- Typical things included in the service charges are the communal electricity, concierge, CCTV, graffiti services, ground maintenance, mechanical and electrical, pest control. All these types of things will be included in the structure and pricing.
- In terms of acceptable standards, I suspect there is probably a mixture i.e., we do it well sometimes and not well at other times and this is something that needs to be worked on. I don't think there are any officers in this room that think we are doing everything amazingly well, but we are getting better and some of our results in terms of satisfaction have started to go up in repairs. We are showing good signs but there is still a lot of work to do in terms of where we go from here.

Leaseholder - You say the energy costs have gone up but the Council bulk buy electricity so who is negotiating this and why is it so extremely high?

Marco Pelazza – Home Ownership Services Manager.

- Yes, we do bulk buy, but the Council is not immune to market forces.
- Before the energy crisis the council was able to secure particularly good rates. Unfortunately, although costs have recently come down, they are higher than before the energy crisis.

Leaseholder - We have been told about new asbestos inspection. We have paid for previous asbestos inspections where they were not able to get access. Will a notification letter be sent out so that we are not paying for multiple inspections?

Marco Pelazza – Home Ownership Services Manager

- Regulations mean we must inspect annually any building that has communal areas.
- A visual inspection is deemed to be sufficient.

- Experts will determine whether there is asbestos or likely to be asbestos. This will depend on things such as the type of construction, type of materials, and age of building.
- They will then produce a report stating they have inspected to see whether the component which has or is likely to have asbestos is damaged.
- If there is damage, we must repair it.
- If the component is not damaged, it is deemed safe and not requiring any more work. It will then require a further inspection later to confirm there has not been any deterioration.
- Samples are taken to determine whether a component has asbestos. If there is no asbestos, it is removed from the list.
- Where a component can't be accessed and is deemed to have asbestos it will be reinspected each year, for example, roof tiles.
- The question of whether we take samples from these is a cost-benefit exercise. For example, sampling a roof tile will cost more.
- Over the next few years, the Council will be carrying out roof repairs and replacements, so eventually there will come a point where our properties will not have any asbestos. Until that point, we are legally required to carry out surveys.

Martin Greenway – Head of Repairs

- As a matter of routine, surveyors generally don't send letters to inform people of surveys to gain access.

Rasheed Said - Head of Housing Income and Leasehold Services

- Will take the query relating to the charging model and have a separate discussion with the leaseholder who has raised the issue of the contractor potentially charging for multiple visits when they haven't notified in advance.

Leaseholder - I live in a large building and if there is one leak it goes through to other flats. What is the management approach to maintenance, e.g., the cost of replacing a tap is cheaper than leaving it and it turns into a major repair?

Cllr Brett

- I don't know the details of the case, but we need to investigate this and why a tap wasn't fixed which created a larger repair.

QUESTION TWO – Does Ealing as a Council think that they are maintaining their properties to a decent standard? If so, why aren't repairs being dealt with in a timely manner? Why are buildings in disrepair? This prevents leaseholders from selling their properties.

Cllr Brett

- In terms of repairs, we have had issues with contractors in the past and we are now working with two contractors to resolve repairs.
- One of the contractors sits within the council building with the repairs team so that we can talk to them, hold them to account and have a conversation rather than being an us and them approach. From this point of view, it's improving.
- Performance wise in May, 99% of emergency repairs were completed on time and it was 85% for routine work. This is a snapshot in time, and we want to see this as a continuing trend. We want to make sure that our contractors are working efficiently and giving us value for money. We are focused on this.
- We are currently going through a major restructuring and part of the aim is to make sure the service is fit for practice, up to scratch and we will be working much more closely with residents. We want permanent staff with continued responsibility rather than a lot of interims. We are almost at the end of it. Permanent roles have been advertised where there are gaps.
- In terms of stock condition, we are about 75% through a survey. It will give us a clearer idea of long-term repairs needed and what goes into regeneration. We have less money than before so the stock condition survey will help the prioritisation.

Rukshan Kariyawasam - Head of Housing Assets and Capital Investment

- The scope of the stock condition survey will identify internal and external matters.
- Our aim is to move away from reactive major works.
- Over the next three to four months, once we've gathered the data from the stock condition survey we will look at things such as net present value, look at where our investment needs are, and formulate a capital program for the next ten to thirty years.
- My ambition is to develop a comprehensive capital investment program that will be published on the website.
- The asset management strategy will also be published - in September.

Leaseholder – tenants pay less for repairs than we pay for major works. We need to think about how the pricing is done and how it can be done more cheaply.

Rukshan Kariyawasam - Head of Housing Assets and Capital Investment

- When we go to tender for the major works program our aim is to have leaseholders involved in forums and steering groups where you can get involved in how we select contractors.
- Leaseholders will be given appropriate training and support to participate.
- The council will also look at social value.

Leaseholder – what is the Council going to do about insulation in solid brick properties built in the 1930s. They are too cold, expensive on heating, and very out of date. Are they going to be improved?

Rukshan Kariyawasam - Head of Housing Assets and Capital Investment

- Solid wall properties are tricky, but we are looking at all types of properties and alternative methods.
- We will investigate existing cavities and plan appropriate work. The type of construction will determine the work carried out.
- We have recently received £6m match funding from central government. We will be delivering energy retrofits to several hundred properties over the next few years.

QUESTION THREE – Why can't the Council produce a breakdown of costs for leaseholder services such as garden maintenance and street cleansing as they do with repairs. We are paying for services with no evidence that the work has been carried out.

Marco Pelazza – Home Ownership Services Manager

- Presented the PowerPoint presentation as a general response to this question. Points included that currently the Council's IT systems don't interface in a way that can provide this information. When required, the information must be extracted manually.

Leaseholder – can we have a separate ECLA forum to discuss operational and service charge costs?

Marco Pelazza – Home Ownership Services Manager

- Clarified that the Council does not make any profit on the charges to leaseholders.
- The Council is happy to work directly with leaseholders to discuss costs.

Leaseholder – even if no profit is being made given that the Council does not have access to certain data how can it be sure that contracts are being managed well? Leaseholders are penalized due to these types of cost management issues.

Leaseholder – I have a repair that I have been chasing for four years. I have been paying my service charges, but the problem has not been solved.

Martin Greenway - Repairs

- Have enjoyed listening to all the feedback and it's important that we listen to our customers.
- Will speak with leaseholder separately to get the details of the four-year repair.

Rasheed Said - Head of Housing Income and Leasehold Services

- I am committed to providing a transparent service charge process which we are working to improve. For example, perhaps a service charge panel.
- Will work to find the right vehicle to work through service charge issues.

ECLA Chair

- ECLA will clarify the meetings and groups that we want with the council and work out the timelines needed.
- Thanked all leaseholders for attending and the Council officers for staying until the end.
- Closed the meeting.