

Minutes of Leaseholders Forum 7 Dec 04

Present: Hereward Cooke, Stuart Mudie, Charles Thurston
Chairman: Pauline Walton

The meeting was very well attended and only one agenda item was covered: the update on the Citycare contract review.

- ?? Stuart Mudie spoke about the Citycare contract at length outlining the background and informing the forum that he was preparing a report for the Executive of the Council which would be published before the end of January: Stuart also asked for volunteers from the floor to join in a working group to look at the issues affecting leaseholders and to feed into the report he was preparing
- ?? One meeting has taken place between Citycare and the Council to discuss the way forward for leaseholders, and the focus is on the contract (of the nine in force) which concerns Major Works.
- ?? The potential areas for improvement identified so far are as follows:
 - o to look for increased competition in offering work for tender
 - o to institute a system of benchmarking cost of works which can be scrutinised for fairness
 - o to consider a partnering arrangement for types of work across the whole housing portfolio
- ?? Stuart Mudie asked for volunteer leaseholders who would be prepared to meet the Council to discuss the way forward and review ideas. Five (or six?) names were put forward.
- ?? The meeting was emotional, but leaseholders made it clear that they expected the following demands to be incorporated into the review process:
 - o there will be a demonstrable reduction in charges for Major Works, which will be comparable to commercially available rates
 - o consultation on Major Works will include evidence of two estimates
 - o full justification for Major Works will be part of the leaseholder consultation process
 - o leaseholders want to be compensated for overcharges made during the Citycare contract
 - o leaseholders are looking for a fairer system of cost apportionment
- ?? Stuart Mudie has been asked to report back to the Council in January.
- ?? Ken Leggett put forward the following motion for all leaseholders to sign, which was seconded by Charlie Ringwood and supported unanimously (54 leaseholder signatures):

On 23rd November 2004, Charles Thurston made the following written statement to a Norwich City Council Leaseholder:

"In the light of the Council's commitment to review charging to Leaseholders in the next three months it has been decided not to respond to individual recharge queries until the global review is complete."

This means that for the time being, Leaseholder invoices for major works or maintenance have no basis for justification, and Norwich City Council Leaseholders are advised to withhold payment until the review is complete.

We, the undersigned will not be remitting payment for such work until we are satisfied that all charges will be made on a reasonable basis. We will be informing other Leaseholders of our action and encouraging them to follow our example.

This petition will be forwarded to the Leader of the Council, Hereward Cook and Stuart Mudie (head of Housing). Stuart Mudie responded by agreeing not to pursue charges for Major Works while the review is underway, although invoices will be sent out as usual.

- ?? Ken Leggett reported that he had sought a second opinion on the estimate for roofing repairs on his block in Russet Grove. The Council are charging £4,850 (for the block) compared to the commercial estimate of £2160. This is the kind of case which leaseholders are so unhappy about.
- ?? The legality of the Citycare contract is currently being looked into and leaseholders will be approached on the subject when we know more.
- ?? The Citycare contract was signed in April 2000 and section 20 of the 1985 Act regarding handling of Major Works by local authorities was superceded by the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act on 31st October 2003 (this date will be checked). Details of this change to the law were sent out to Leaseholders in June 2000.
- ?? We were reminded that advice on Leasehold issues is obtainable free from the Leaseholders Association at www.lease-advice.org.
- ?? Charles Thurston is in the process of ensuring that all leaseholders are sent a copy of Tenant Talk.