

# **BARNSBURY HOUSING ASSOCIATION**

## **Summary of Resident Panel meeting**

**held on October 4 2019 at Cloudesley House, 16b Cloudesley Street, London N1 0HU**

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**Present:** Liam, Dot, Logan, Janice, Fenan, Steve, James

**Staff/Board:** Susan French (CEO) (SF)  
Dean McGlynn (Project Manager) (DMc)  
Ian Prendergast (Asset Manager) (IP)  
Nancy Korman (Board member) (NK)

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Apologies were received from Chris Bell.

### **2. Resident Board Members**

SF updated the panel on the results of the recruitment for resident board members. Janice Walsh and Chris Bell have been selected as board members and Fenan Emmanuel has been asked to join the Audit & Risk Committee.

### **3. Repairs Schedule**

IP outlined that this document was created for the purpose to make it clear to residents and staff what repairs BHA do and what they don't do. This ensured a greater sense of fairness and transparency.

Logan asked for clarity on broken glazing and that it should include that BHA will make safe before fully repairing.

Janice agreed and asked if it was a tenant's fault if it would result in a recharge to them. IP confirmed it would but added that BHA would recommend services of other companies that may be cheaper and quicker and avoid admin time and costs for BHA.

Liam and James felt that carrying out works on taps and washers was unrealistic and they were jobs for plumbers. James added that the bleeding radiators and radiator valves should be clearer. Janice added that water stop cocks may be in awkward positions for residents to get to, such as in someone else's home or property.

Logan asked for clarity on important equipment such as electrical equipment and specialist equipment being covered by BHA. James also felt it would be worth including BHA repairs and out of hours contacts on this.

Liam felt there were several contentious items such as ceramic floor tiles and repositioning entry phones, that would be influenced by how they were damaged and how long they've been in place for. Liam added that it needs to be clarified if BHA install something, such as an electric shower, if they will continue to maintain this or if it becomes a tenant's responsibility.

Liam also felt that a clear recharge policy was needed and that it would feed into this document. NK added that if BHA were to decide to not maintain certain aspects for residents then they would need to give notice to residents ahead of this.

Liam added that the document wasn't clear about existing tenants that have made adaptations already and if these will become an incoming tenant's responsibility. IP said this would be covered in the voids standard more but agreed that an alterations and adaptations policy would be worth looking at.

NK and Fenan asked how BHA know residents have made adaptations such as electrical works and how they get permission. IP responded that tenants should seek permission but often won't inform BHA. However, this will be noted in an electrical safety check which BHA carry out every 5 years.

NK asked if BHA carry out an inspection with an outgoing tenant to discuss any likely repairs or recharges. IP informed NK that this happens but is now being formalised and improving.

Fenan asked if it was possible to allow an incoming tenant to see a property before it becomes empty. SF agreed this was preferable and BHA do this where possible but it's often difficult when tenants do not give enough notice and if BHA are waiting on nomination from the Council.

Liam asked if gas should be included in urgent repairs. IP thought it would be beneficial to include Transco's number to make it clear it's them who BHA tenants should contact if they smell gas.

Logan described an incident where a BHA staff member had broken a lightbulb and not replaced it. SF clarified that if BHA break something they will repair it.

Logan added that she had read about difficulties in setting up smart meters and believed that BHA should hold off on introducing these until the technology had improved. Steve commented that he had recently been through this experience and found it simple and beneficial. SF informed the panel that energy efficiency and fuel poverty would be on the agenda for the next meeting to discuss this further.

James asked if TV aerial repairs would be considered an emergency. IP responded that residents typically consider this an important and urgent job and also that BHA's responsibility is to maintain communal aerials which would therefore affect a number of residents.

Steve added that this document should be linked to home and contents insurance and asked if accidental fires are covered by BHA's insurance or if the tenant would be liable for this.

Steve also asked if it was possible to share more information on planned repairs to give tenants a realistic timescale, as often the frustration is not being told that it won't be done for a while but not getting a clear indication of roughly when it could be done. IP agreed and added that this was being worked on.

Steve also asked about gaps in the windows at Highbury View, as he was having issues with this, causing his energy costs to go up. SF and IP agreed that it would be worth visiting his home to investigate this issue.

It was agreed for any further changes in the document to be sent to DMc over the next couple of weeks.

#### 4. **Voids and Lettable Standards**

SF introduced the Voids and Lettable standards as a document that had not been done by BHA before but was necessary to address rising costs and time taken to carry out void works.

IP explained the document to the panel, emphasising that BHA want to let properties in good condition and quickly as there is a level of work in any property that becomes empty but also ensure BHA are getting the best value for the work being done.

Most panel members agreed BHA's approach was slightly better and more generous than comparable organisations. The document also featured better, clearer language.

Janice believed it made sense but asked about BHA's approach to decorating empty properties. IP informed her that BHA won't do this as a standard approach but often will if the condition of the property requires it. BHA can also offer decorating vouchers for incoming tenants where appropriate.

NK asked about BHA's approach to security gates. IP informed her that it was standard for BHA to remove security gates due to the risk of entrapment if a fire occurred in a home.

Liam asked if, in line with the repairs responsibilities document, that having this standard was a way to recharge residents for multiple items. The panel agreed that this was not the purpose of this standard but that a recharge policy would something worth looking at in the future.

Fenan wondered if allowing incoming tenants to view a property and agree a standard before it becomes void would be a way of reducing the work needed for BHA. SF agreed, indicating that BHA do allow internal transfers to view homes very early on in the process in order to agree for any items to be left such as flooring and blinds.

The panel agree that it would be worth visiting a couple of empty properties to understand the works that BHA will carry out to bring them to a lettable standard.

#### 5. **Domestic Violence Policy**

SF introduced this policy as BHA's first ever domestic violence policy and how more and more social landlords were doing work on this to separate this issue from anti-social behaviour policies.

Logan wondered why there was no mention of the police until the last paragraph, as she believed that they should be contacted due to it being a criminal offence and the earlier they are informed the better. Logan also added that BHA should clarify whose

name is on the tenancy and should add in aspects on coercive control and financial abuse. Logan added that BHA should state in the process that Domestic Violence is unacceptable.

JW disagreed in that the last thing the victim may want is police involvement and that they must give consent for this.

Liam felt the policy was upside down and that the police should be mentioned much earlier in the process. He also had concerns about implications for staff and that BHA's role should be in signposting rather than conducting their own investigations and that this should be clearer in the process

Dot also had concerns about the burden of responsibility this would place on staff and if BHA had capacity to do this while also providing safe spaces and providing same sex staff members. Dot highlighted the first paragraph of to be clearer on training that staff have received.

Liam added that some points could be removed to make the policy more impactful, make it clearer that BHA signpost to other services and that a process map would be useful. NK agreed and that a clear statement of the landlord's responsibilities would also be useful. NK also highlighted in the last paragraph that it would be useful to make it clearer if this refers to a tenancy.

## 6. **Future Policy Reviews**

The following topics were identified as of interest to the panel:

- ASB/Bullying
- Recharges
- Adaptions/Upgrades
- Smart meters
- Emergency Numbers

## 7. **Any Other Business**

DMc will circulate dates for 2020 soon so we can plan ahead for next year.