

Minutes
Leaseholder Meeting with Council Officials 13 March 2024

Attendees – Pullens Tenants and Residents

<i>Crompton St</i>	<i>Amelia St</i>	<i>Iliffe St</i>
(Vice) Chair: Tom Scutt	Secretary: Miriam Jones	Angela Shortt
David Cook	Sarah Timewell	Johnny Harris
Tony Hursit	Dylan Atkins	Kevin Enwright (TRA committee)
Will Robinson	Emily Townshend	Kym Winstanley (TRA committee)
	Gilbert Townshend	Simon Hiscock
	Noemi Conan	Toby Prior
	Ros Lewis	
	Sabrina George	
<i>Peacock St</i>	<i>Penton Place</i>	
Daniel Hortop	Margie Staker	

Attendees – Southwark Council Officials

Councillor, Natasha Ennin
Head of Investment, Richard Ndudi
Homeownership Manager, Trevor Wellbeloved

Apologies

Assistant Director of Building Safety, Desmond Vincent
Michael Hammer, TRA Chair
Ben Hart, Crompton Street
Clare Toolan, Crompton Street
Emma Gange, Peacock Street
Jenny Hamilton, Amelia Street

Intro

Tom S outlined purpose for the meeting:

- Transparency about and breakdown invoiced costs in the final bills
- Accuracy of invoicing
- Payment modalities
- Communications practices and failures

Group discussion

Poor communication with Southwark Council

Sabrina asked for a history of management of Pullens.

Miriam pointed out a chronology of events around the 2016 work has been sent to the TRA (<https://www.pullenstra.org/2024/02/11/resources-pullens-warm-dry-safe-fire-risk-assessment-major-works/>)

RN: He's only been in post a year and acknowledges that communication appears to have been a long-standing problem. He says his department will work to improve communication and regain trust.

They aren't looking at doing major works for another 2 years, not before 2026. A survey will be done this year and a proposal put forward to the TRA.

Tom raised problems people had had communicating with Southwark over their bills.

TW: SC have moved to digital communication with the aim of improving communication (see <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/home-owners-services/contacting-us>). If we email one person there might be a delay if they're on holiday/otherwise engaged. By completing e-forms all correspondence relating to a particular property are collated, the whole department can access them so the response will be quicker. There's more continuity from his department, Southwark observations, as Nicolette Dundas responds to everything. Accounts are understaffed so it's better to call to arrange payments.

Gilbert submitted photos of problems to Dundas 3 weeks ago and hasn't had a reply.

Several people said they'd got replies to their e-form that didn't fully answer their question and there was no way to follow-up: replies generated an automatic response to complete another e-form.

TW: said replies are read and addressed even though the council's preference is for e-forms.

Simon said he'd attended the regular meetings throughout the work and raised issues which weren't listened to. The council always sided with Elkins in dismissing his concerns, instead of behaving like the clients. Examples were the HeliBars which were fitted without explanation despite repeated requests. Their position on the rear addition, under windows, make no sense. Hinges to newly fitted windows started rusting quickly. Instead of replacing them all they only replaced them when customers complained.

TW: We can't go back now and can't address those points. TRA accompanied snagging walkabouts.

NE: From this meeting she's heard there was communication but no listening. It's important that's improved, particularly around procurement.

Sabrina? said it's always the same. We were told it would be different this time but it was worse and the most expensive.

RN: will aim to attend TRA meetings regularly and include TRA in decisions to select contractors.

Delay of the final invoice

Someone asked why there was a 2 yr gap from the final cost being provided by Elkins to the final invoice being sent to leaseholders.

TW: referred to the chronology that had already been emailed and clarified they received the final cost from Elkins in 2022, 6-7 months before it was sent to leaseholders.

Gilbert repeated the concern emailed that delays had resulted in new homeowners paying for work they weren't responsible for because retention agreements had expired.

TW: repeated the reply that had been sent that it's up to the homeowner's solicitor to ensure the retention agreement time doesn't expire before the final invoice, to modify if necessary.

RN: Accepted it shouldn't have taken this long for Elkins to produce the final bill and for it to be issued to leaseholders.

Cost

Miriam asked why the snagging had dragged out over 3 years and how it affected the final cost.

TW: Confirmed there's no additional cost for snagging delays. The Council held a retention on the outstanding matters and only paid Elkins once those were settled. The administrative charges levied by Southwark Council are a flat rate of 10%, as determined by the lease. No interest has been accrued on those prices.

All contractors used by Southwark Council establish an extensive schedule of rates as part of their contract which is agreed by the council. Potter Raper, Southwark Council's appointed Clerk of Works on the project, ensured the 2016 schedule of rates was used for the final bill. Admin charges of 10% were added, as confirmed in our leases.

Tony said the schedule of rates is too high, eg, doors costing £1,700. Bulk buying should result in competitive/cheaper prices and there isn't evidence of that.

Dylan said Elkins agreeing costs with the Council looks like a monopoly. He asked for more information on how that works.

RN: The process is called price harmonisation. Every year Elkins/Council contractors negotiate a discount for bulk buying big purchases (not parts) from manufacturers, rates agreed by the council. This always brings the price down.

TW: As the council pay a proportion for tenants they have a vested interest in getting value for money.

Tom said we still hadn't had a reasonable explanation for the increase in costs from the original estimate.

TW: In 2018 an additional cost document was sent out which warned us of 2/3 increase in the final bill.

Miriam says she didn't get that and asked for a show of hands from any who did receive it. No-one in the room had and Miriam pointed out we'd all gone back over our documentation in preparation for this meeting. Tom said he'd put in a FOI for all documents relating to the Major Works prog as he wasn't living on the estate at the time. The additional cost document wasn't amongst them even though he'd had every Section 20B notice.

Simon said the costs are excessive. Doors were originally quoted as £1,200, scaffolding is 2.5 times of original rate.

Someone said very little work was done to flats in her stairwell and she hasn't heard of any others on the street that did so she doesn't understand how the bill could be large.

Sarah said her itemised bill for Amelia St included £8480 for windows, almost 50% of the entire bill, but there wasn't specific information: how many were repaired/replaced and how many windows there are in total. That information is needed to evaluate fairness.

Someone suggested an annual estimate of the upcoming bill would be more useful than the Section 20B notices. [Action: TRA to repeat this, particularly when the next Major Works prog begins.](#)

Sarah asked if the street's costs were only being divided amongst leaseholders.

TW clarified the terms of our lease: costs for maintaining interiors are the responsibility of leaseholders, costs for exteriors are divided across all properties on the street. Southwark Council pays the proportion for tenanted properties (see <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/home-owners-services/service-charges/about-service-charges>).

Someone asked if we'd been charged for roof repairs instead of claims being made on the warranties.

TW: Said that wouldn't be the case.

Repayment can be spread over the months until the end of June on request from Accounts. He recommended that anyone in great hardship call Accounts.

NE: If you plan to contest the final bill it's important to pay so no action can be taken for breach of the lease. Make a note the payment is "under protest" (template available: <https://www.pullenstra.org/2024/02/11/resources-pullens-warm-dry-safe-fire-risk-assessment-major-works/>).

TW: Even without that wording it's possible to contest a bill after payment with discounts applied later.

NE: Strongly advised using "payment under protest" which is the recommendation of Citizens Advice Southwark for independent Homeowners Advice.

For anyone who has more questions and wants to know how to proceed, she recommended they contact CA.

Tom confirmed the TRA had got advice from CA and LEASE and backed up NE's recommendation.

Doors

Someone said he was charged £1,700 for a new door but wasn't warned it was narrower so he can't move things out of his flat. Nor was he warned what it would cost. Screws were missing from hinges. It isn't value for money. New doors can be bought much cheaper.

TW: It is good value for the high spec fire-proofing of the door and fitting costs.

Miriam: At the last meeting someone had complained about their door bill of £1,700 and got it reduced to £300 (actually from £1087.61 to £393.18 for installation of intumescent seals, hinges and door closer).

Someone said he was offered a new or refurbished front door. He could choose but wasn't told the cost differential. He never would have chosen a new door if he'd realised the high cost and that it wasn't like-for-like, eg it's narrower.

Kym: an example of a door to replace ours was on display before work began and pictured in a newsletter. It wasn't the same as the doors we got which turned out to be not as good.

Someone said the hinges of her door were replaced and the door was repainted, but with her own paint so she could ensure it was the right colour, so she can't understand the high cost.

Gilbert: He's been charged for work that wasn't done on his door. Intumescent seals were not fitted.

TW: The Clerk of Works should sign off all work. When asked who the CofW was, he said, Potter Raper. They're on a long-term contract with the Council.

Sarah: She'd never had a visit from their surveyor, Darron Barlow.

TW: Sarah should have had a visit from Potter Raper to sign off works as all properties should have.

RN: Action: In response to these complaints his department will do random quality checks of doors to see work that was invoiced has been done.

Will said he'd been charged £1,000 for very little work on his front door and, despite several attempts to get clarification from the Council, hasn't had any.

Tony?: He's making a formal complaint about the cost of the door. £1,700 is too high. He got a quote for the same spec door for £1,200.

TW: Action: His department had given discounts to some who'd complained about the cost of their front doors and realised this was unfair so they're going to look again at all door costs, including **Will's** flat (took his address). Those people who had less repairs on their doors may get a bill reduction. He is confident people weren't encouraged to renew doors unnecessarily.

Miriam had been told that self-closures for the doors had been charged at £233.60 but **Dylan** had found them online for £50.

TW: Labour costs have been added.

Miriam: Those labour costs are very high!

Quality of work

Gilbert: An electrician told him he won't fit a smart meter as wiring in the stairwell is unsafe.

Johnny: pilasters redecoration has been charged for but not done. Elkins hammered sections out to prep but didn't complete so now there are sections open to the elements and they're deteriorating more rapidly. They look terrible and are bringing the estate down.

Kym: Pilasters repairs are urgent and can't wait for the next major works prog.

RN: Action: Will discuss this with his department.

Angela?: This was a Warm, Dry, Safe prog of works but it was none of those things:

Warm: the new door rattles

Dry: water coming from toilet

Safe: window catches are loose, frames are rotting and hinges rusting

She fears profiteering went on. Communication was not transparent so it's hard to show otherwise.

NE: Action: From what she's heard she believes there should be an investigation into the work of Potter Raper who appear to have signed off incomplete work.

She asked RN what can be done about faults reported in the meeting.

RN: Action: He will liaise with the repairs team, perhaps hold a repair day for leaseholders to raise issues. Will look at whether any of the faults are covered by warranty.

Windows

Sabrina asked why single glazing had been put in during a programme to make homes warm, dry and safe. Miriam remembers that decision came from residents who couldn't face the higher bill of double-glazed wooden windows.

TW: He's also surprised and wondered whether it was because it's a conservation area which might be behind problems getting planning permission for double glazing.

Takeaways for Southwark Council

Tom asked what the Officers would take away from the meeting.

RN: Action: Improve resident engagement, listen more, examine the quality of work done, look at what to do about pilasters.

TW: Action: Will look into what legal steps can be taken to hold contractors to account after the contract is complete. There's a need to streamline processes so there isn't such a long wait for the final invoice.

NE: Action: Improvements are needed to make bills more transparent and simpler, eg, itemising the number of windows and have better liaison with TRA. She will advocate but can't make promises particularly as Southwark Council in financial trouble.