



**LTF REPORT: Single Issue Meetings
September - October 2023**

Repairs and Major Works — 14 September
Fuel Poverty and Carbon Net Zero — 5 October
Repairs and Major Works — 12 October

MEETING REPORT: Major Works and Repairs

Meeting date: 14 September 2023

Tenants, residents and leaseholders from seven boroughs — Camden, Ealing, Lambeth, Kingston, Southwark, Waltham Forest and Westminster — came together for a single issue meeting on Major Works and Repairs.

Attendees discussed various issues related to housing repairs and major works, including their experiences with the usage of poor quality materials, overcharging by contractors and lack of communication from their respective councils. They also discussed possible solutions to these concerns, including contacting local councillors and using resources like Leasehold Advisory Service ([LEASE](#) — an executive, non-departmental public body, sponsored by the [Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities](#)). LEASE provides free legal advice to leaseholders and can clarify questions relating to any laws affecting residential leasehold in England and Wales.

Those at the meeting also discussed, in detail, the experiences of those living on an estate that has undergone regeneration since 2010. Estate residents at the meeting shared that there has been a clear lack of engagement with residents, and that this exemplifies a larger issue of poor communication by the local authority.

Tenants agreed on an urgent need for central government to support councils (importantly, financially) and provide sufficient funding so that local authorities can carry out their obligations to their tenants and local authority residents. Essential services remain underfunded, and inadequate support has prohibited their provision. This perspective was further supported by a broader discussion around the funding crisis facing many London boroughs and housing associations, which are struggling to balance their budgets and provide essential services.

The meeting concluded with tenants sharing information about housing repairs teams and companies to avoid or to monitor closely. Notably, these include some major players, including Morgan Sindall, GEM and Osbournes.

MEETING REPORT: Fuel Poverty and Carbon Net Zero

Meeting date: 5 October 2023

Tenants and residents from eight boroughs — Ealing, Hackney, Hammersmith & Fulham, Hounslow, Kingston, Lambeth, Newham and Southwark — came together to discuss fuel poverty and carbon net zero.

Heating and Hot Water Charges

Tenant representatives spoke in detail about rising heating and hot water charges. Those from Lambeth shared concerns about rising heat and hot water charges, and their efforts to support their fellow residents in light of these cost changes. These tenant representatives shared that they were encouraged to contact Ofgem for assistance. Citizens Advice was mentioned as another resource for tenants facing these issues. This conversation delved briefly into a discussion of the legality of Lambeth's decision to undercharge for the previous year and to shift the payment to the following year.

Meeting attendees also shared how their charges have changed over the years. One tenant remarked on the unequal way these changes have taken place, sharing that their charges have stayed fairly stable — due to drastic measures — but their neighbours' charges have shot up to about £30 per week. They discussed a letter from their Council stating that charges would rise by over 200%. Another tenant representative shared that their charges have increased by £50 per month, despite their boiler not working for six weeks. Other residents tenant representative

Ultimately, despite this steep climb in prices, council tenants have received little support from their respective local authorities.

Building on the above conversation, tenant representatives spoke about the installation of smart meters and the daily charges that are associated with them. Some members expressed concerns about being forced to have a smart meter, and the potential to be subject to increased standing charges. One member shared that leaseholders received an extra £735 for heating cost. Many representatives were shocked by the 300% increase in heating costs for elderly residents and suggested that this is the result of councils purchasing energy at the wrong time.

Meeting attendees also discussed the consultation by the regulator of social housing on the revised consumer standards (closed 17th October — see LTF response [here](#)) and changes to cost of living payments, including a fund provided by the government to assist those falling between the cracks. They recognised that councils have a lot of leeway to decide how to allocate these funds, and that this raises concerns about accountability. Local resources, such as food banks, were recommended to those struggling; however, some food banks require referrals. Members identified (i) the need for a fair and progressive energy pricing system and (ii) greater availability of local support such as food banks and pantries.

Tenant representatives also touched upon the issue of smart meters and tariffs. Some members expressed concerns about being forced to have a smart meter, and the potential to be subjects to increased standing charges. Additionally, attendees expressed frustration with the government's failure to include plans for a social tariff in energy market reforms, despite making commitments in two budget statements. Fuel poverty campaigners from National Energy Action were upset about this, and warned that targeted energy bill support could not be pushed back even further. They urge the government to put into place a more long-term solution, such as a social tariff, to ensure that all customers can afford their bills.

Finally, meeting attendees shared information about the predicted, upcoming drop in energy costs and the new price cap for unit prices of electricity and gas; some raised concerns — based on personal experiences — that while their energy provider has reduced the unit rate of energy, they have increased standing charges, thereby bringing the overall total. In one case, this has tripled one of the member's gas bills, and provides no incentive to save energy, as cost doesn't particularly change relative to use.

This meeting highlighted the following questions:

- How can we address the issue of high heat network charges?
- Is there a fairer system for energy pricing that encourages energy conservation?
- Why did the government abandon plans for a social energy tariff?
- What can be done about increasing standing charges?

MEETING REPORT: Major Works and Repairs

Meeting date: 12 October 2023

Tenant representatives from seven boroughs — Camden, Ealing, Kingston, Lambeth, Southwark and Westminster — discussed issues and concerns relating to major works and repairs.

Tenants from Southwark asked the network for advice on how to effectively complain about disrepair and managed decline — sharing that necessary repairs and maintenance of buildings has been neglected, and that they have found it difficult to determine the frequency of external decorations.

Others shared suggestions, including:

- Contacting [4 million homes](#) for training and support
- Speaking to the council's Asset Manager for major works and repairs
- Contacting the Housing Ombudsman and Regulator of Social Housing — if you initially contact the wrong one, they can refer your case to the other. You can also contact the new Housing Regulator to enquire about local authorities' recognition of community groups
- Asking for resident engagement meetings, where council tenants and local councillors are both present, and tenants can take their grievances to councillors directly
- Finding out who the manager of the council's Tenant Engagement team is and contacting them directly
- Contacting the Lead Member for Housing (or equivalent position) in your borough and asking them to do a members inquiry on your behalf

Attendees also discussed the lack of consultation with residents by local authorities and the need for Tenant Participatory Advisory Service ([TPAS](#)) members to consult with residents.

Note: TPAS represents social landlords and their staff, as well as tenants and leaseholders.

Meeting attendees from street properties shared that there is a lack of support and resources for street properties, as councils often ignore street party participation. Others

suggested that street property tenants should try to form borough-wide associations in order to organise and engage as a collective body rather than as individuals.

One key topic of conversation was how essential it is for tenants to know their rights. It is important to talk to the council, but there is a chance that if a tenant does not have knowledge or experience, they are more likely to be taken advantage of, or given the runaround. Tenants are more likely to accept these weak excuses if they are not aware of what they are entitled to or what the regulations are.

As local authorities have defunded borough-wide tenants organisations, there are fewer places run by and for tenants where they can access the information and resources they need. It is important that tenants are as knowledgeable as possible so that they can adequately demand all that they are entitled to, without pushback by officials.

Tenant representatives also discussed the importance of perseverance and patience in the fight for tenants' rights. One tenant shared their TRA's successful advocacy strategies, though these did require them living with mould in many of the flats for over one year. Other attendees were advised to know their rights and (in Southwark), seek help from SGTO — the borough wide tenant organisation.

Attendees at the meeting also discussed repair and maintenance schedules for emergencies, non-emergencies and out-of-hours repairs. Tenants were advised to contact the water leaks department directly for faster action, and attendees emphasised the importance of speaking with a human to expedite repairs and maintenance (versus submitting an online request).

Finally, a couple of important reminders were shared:

- If you are going to a resident engagement meeting, but nobody seems to know what information they should give you — you are entitled to know all relevant information.
- You are entitled to be part of the decision-making process.
- It is important to know what the budget is for every service connected to housing management.