

DRAFT



**Wellington Mills Housing Co-operative
General Meeting
Held on Thursday 28th March 2024 at 7pm at the Oasis Academy**

Present: Charlotte Axelson (CA, MC Co-Chair), Frances Murphy (FM, MC Co-Chair), Alistair Crosby (AC, MC Secretary, Minutes), Sheila Smith (SS, MC Assistant Secretary), Kate Thompson (KT, MC Treasurer), Pam Dockerill (PD, MC member), Peter Lane (PL, MC member), plus 31 other residents. *This exceeds the quorum of 25 members.*

In attendance: Roseline Mann (RM, Estate Director)

1. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence. CA took the opportunity to re-introduce the MC to the members present.

2. Request to approve the minutes of the General Meeting held on 21st September 2023, including matters arising not on the agenda

Elaine Whittock (EW) clarified that in item 5 (update on Major Works), her proposal had been to pre-authorise up to £25,000 of restricted surplus funds to be spent on specialist reports on the *previous*, not upcoming, Major Works (the motion that passed concerned only the upcoming Major Works).

There were no further corrections to the minutes, and they were approved by a **VOTE** (Prop: Carole Donaghy (CD), Sec: Paul Cottrell (PC), In favour: 37, Against: 0, Abstentions: 1).

3. Oral report from the Chair of the Management Committee

CA began by discussing staffing matters. CA explained that RM's six-month probation had been reviewed by the Staffing Sub-Committee in February. The sub-committee felt that RM's performance had exceeded expectations and recommended to the MC that her position be made permanent, to which the MC agreed. There followed a well-deserved round of applause. The Staffing Sub-Committee

DRAFT

had also taken the opportunity to take a wider look at office staffing. Ade, the current temporary Housing Officer, will leave at the end of March. Then, for the next 18 months, we will have a part-time Housing Officer and an apprentice from a Lambeth-approved provider. The apprentice represents a particularly good deal for WM: Lambeth will pay an extra allowance, meaning we save at least £10K a year on costs, whilst gaining an extra member of staff. Hiring an apprentice is a good way of giving back to the community, and hopefully the apprentice will be keen to learn and make the most of their opportunity. Interviews for the apprentice position were held on Tuesday.

CA then talked about the Co-operative's financial position. The Co-op has run a significant deficit for the last couple of years as a result in a reduction in the real-terms value of the allowance we receive from Lambeth. Estate management are focussed on making cost savings without reducing the level of service on the estate. To this end, we are exploring opportunities for collaboration and resource-sharing with other TMOs.

CA then talked about recent estate improvements. New entryphones had been installed last month as the old system was unreliable and soon to be obsolete. The new system will save about £2,000 a year on line rental costs. Maria Parry-Burns (MPB) commented that the Oakey Lane key fob system was not working, and Bridget Shield (BSh) added that she had experienced similar problems at the Kennington Road entrance. CD commented on poor audio quality with the new system. CA asked everyone to report such problems to the office. PC asked if the new system had been thoroughly checked. RM explained that there is a comprehensive follow-up agreement with the vendor.

CA followed-up on the point discussed at the last GM, which was that, after a spate of burglaries and anti-social behaviour, a review of the CCTV system was timely. A resident survey had been sent out, with a significant majority of respondents in favour of extending camera coverage. New cameras will therefore be added as proposed.

CA then moved on to the upcoming Major Works, and reminded the meeting, to mordant laughter, how Lambeth's Assistant Director of Housing had sat in this very room a year ago and told us that the works would by now be complete. Clearly that had not happened. A more detailed update would be provided by the Major Works Sub-Group later. CA then discussed how the MC had made ongoing complaints about the unreliability of the hot water system and that this was being escalated to an official complaint as a result of Lambeth's unsatisfactory responses. MPB asked if the MC had approached the local MP. CA said they had not but may do later. PD reminded everyone to report all problems to the office, so we have a reliable picture of the performance of the system.

CA then discussed the large rise in tenant heating charges (from £15 to £60 per week). The China Walk estate have started an action group to fight tenant arrears and have a demonstration planned. CA asked for volunteers to join them. Bryan Scott (BS) asked about meters; he had been told by Andy Marshall that we would have individual bills from April. CA said there were many unanswered questions, and this lack of information would form part of our official complaint. Nicolette Bagnall (NB) noted that there had been no progress on anything related to major works and asked whether we could escalate our complaints above Lambeth officers. CA replied that we had approached councillors and the

DRAFT

ombudsman. BS said that Mead Row residents had recently been issued with a £700 charge for ventilation and that he had complained directly to Lambeth's CEO and received a reply from a senior officer the next day. We should go to the CEO or to the press if we want to see progress. PC said he thought metering would be delayed for tenants because Lambeth have already issued a monthly payment plan for the rest of the year. PC also added that the heating system was not being maintained properly and there had been no testing of valves in his block.

CA moved on to happier news, which is that coffee mornings in the large playground will restart next week. All are welcome. CA then concluded with a plea for volunteers to join the MC and/or sub-committees and sub-groups. There is lots that needs to be done, and we need help to do it. To laughter, MPB asked if you can join if you have an ASBO. CA replied that yes, you can, but the Constitution prevents individuals joining who have rent arrears.

4. Oral report from the Estate Director

RM started with a summary of the Co-operative's performance against Lambeth's metrics for TMOs. Rent collection and arrears recovery is on a downward trend due to the cost-of-living crisis: last August our rate was 101%; it is now down to 96% and we are 5th out of 9 TMOs. Heating charges will fall from April which should improve the situation. However, some arrears are in excess of £3,000 and RM will have no choice but to seek legal referrals if they are persistent. In terms of service charge collection, we are now 8th out of 9 TMOs, with a rate of only 84% against Lambeth's target of 105%. The main issues are some leaseholders paying annually rather than monthly and paying to incorrect invoice numbers. We will aim to improve on both metrics this year. We do better on tenant repairs: our response rate was 100% in January and February (against a target of 90%) and satisfaction with repairs is 100%. Tenancy checks have also exceeded the 10% annual target.

RM then moved on to the Co-operative's financial position. End-of-year accounts are due in May, but the 3Q Management Accounts showed cost savings against budget, particularly with regard to tenant repairs, administration overheads and reserves expenditure; that said, we are still on track to run at a £42K deficit. Furthermore, estate lighting costs have doubled since last year due to the rise in energy prices. However, due to our large (£550K) reserves, we are still in a strong financial position. Lambeth's allowance for this year is about £3500 more than last year's allowance, which is not a big increase. We will need to manage costs carefully this year. We will continue the cyclical maintenance plan, with repairs to the roof and a re-painting of railings. Drains will also be jet washed at least twice to prevent debris build up and flooding. The yellow safety strips on the stair edges are peeling and will need to be repaired or replaced. MPB complained that Shawma do not do things properly. PD commented that the safety strips are damaged by delivery trolleys. RM also said that broken bollards in the parking bays would be replaced.

RM received a round of applause after her update.

DRAFT

5. Update on the Upcoming Major Works

Doug Wright (DW) provided an update on behalf of the Major Works Sub-Group (MWSG). Although the MC had formally written to Lambeth advising of the existence of the MWSG and asking them to be the main point of contact regarding the Major Works, the group have been unable to open communications. Informally, the group had heard that Lambeth have received their own surveyors (Keegan's) report and that it had identified more issues than expected; therefore Lambeth had decided to scale the works back. The MWSG have identified several surveyors to approach for their own independent assessment of Keegan's findings. MPB asked how the surveyors were selected. DW said the criteria were a mix of experience with the estate and relevant expertise.

Ruth Sharvell (RS) expressed huge disappointment at the way we have been messed around by Lambeth, who sat in this very room a year ago claiming that the works would have been finished by now. PL felt that we needed to voice our dissatisfaction to Lambeth's CEO as we have not got anywhere. He worried that there is a risk that we will be rushed into approving a poor project by the Section 20 process. He felt there is a sense that the works are being over-specified and will damage the distinctive appearance and character of the estate. He then made a direct request to the MC to complain to Lambeth's CEO. CA agreed to put this request to a **VOTE**, which passed easily (Prop: PL, Sec: MPB, In favour: 37, Against: 0, Abstentions: 1).

PC then noted that there had been no preventative maintenance of the windows this year. Returning to forms of complaint, Pat Cryan (PCr) asked whether the MC had considered a petition. CA agreed this was a good idea. BS said he would be happy to help organise. Peter Roberts (PR) added that we needed to write to councillors to get noticed, and that he would supply a list of councillors who had been responsive to him in the past. Mark Jeffers (MJ) asked whether other TMOs are having a better experience with their Major Works. CA said it was difficult to directly compare TMOs with different sizes and management agreements and that contact between TMOs was heavily managed by Lambeth. However, RM is trying to foster more informal collaboration and information exchange. NB requested more feedback outside of General Meetings. CA agreed and said regular summaries would be included in More Welly.

Caz Facey (CF) said that she was a trustee at the 20th Century Society and was happy to help. She has lots of contacts and is good with press and social media. CF felt that the upcoming 50th Anniversary of WMHC could be a good "lever" to increase the profile of the estate with Lambeth. FM noted that there had been a meeting with English Heritage more than a year ago to discuss making the estate part of a Conservation Area. CF felt that would be a no-brainer from the point of view of the estate. FM noted that were the estate to be listed, it would no longer be possible to install UPVC windows. CF replied that being part of a Conservation Area carries less arduous responsibilities than being listed. FM agreed to seek further information (**ACTION**). PL concluded by agreeing that being part of a Conservation Area covering the local "triangle" of buildings was a very good idea.

DRAFT

6. Request to approve a change to the Constitution

CA explained that, along with most organisations, the MC have held online or hybrid meetings since the pandemic. Lambeth have been entirely happy with this arrangement, and it has not affected the quality of the MC's decision making. However, the MC have been advised that, legally, the Constitution should be amended to state explicitly that the Management Committee members may attend meetings online, and that this change was now requested to be approved by the GM.

The motion is for

14.1 The Committee shall meet at least ten times a year. Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the procedure laid down by the Co- operative in General Meeting.

To be replaced with

14.1 The Committee shall meet at least ten times a year. Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the procedure laid down by the Co- operative in General Meeting and participants may attend in-person or online.

The motion was put to a **VOTE**, which passed unanimously (Prop: BS, Sec: Bryan Vermeulen, In favour: 38, Abstentions: 0, Against: 0).

7. Request to approve the use of restricted surplus funds to purchase new cycle storage units under the “Bridge to Nowhere”

FM explained that there was a waiting list of six people for secure cycle storage units. A proposal last year to add an additional unit next to the current one in the back car park had been met with negative feedback in a survey, with nearby residents worried about noise and security concerns. The MC had therefore sought the alternative location under the Holst Court “Bridge to Nowhere”, which is secure, easily accessible, and not near any residents. As space is restricted, vertical lockers, rather than a six-bike horizontal store, are required. The cost is £7,072 inc. VAT for six lockers.

Craig Leaper (CL) asked about rental charges and maximum capacity. FM replied that charges would be £42/year (the lockers will never make a profit) and that there is space for about ten (although the proposal is initially for six). PD asked if we still had dedicated garage space for cycles. CA said we did, and had done so for twenty years, but that it had historically been unpopular as is relatively inaccessible and less secure than a dedicated storage unit. CA agreed that we should re-advertise it in More Welly as it may suit some people (**ACTION**). PCr asked if Lambeth will fund new storage units for us. FM said we had asked, but the answer was no. CF asked if we could consider alternative sources of funding. CL then asked if this motion could be postponed until the next GM to allow the MC to re-publicise the existing garage storage. AC noted that the locker and garage storage offers were different in terms of

DRAFT

accessibility and security and would appeal to different users. The proposal to purchase six lockers was then put to a **VOTE**, which passed (Prop: Daniel Sincel, Sec: CL, In favour: 22, Abstentions: 4, Against: 4).

8. Request to pre-authorise the use of restricted surplus funds to cover the cost of future specialist advice relating to the previous Major Works

CA reiterated that the recently installed hot water/HIU system was expensive and unreliable and that many complaints to Lambeth from the MC has been rebuffed, and therefore that the MC may need to seek specialist or legal advice. The MC therefore requested authorisation to spend up to £5,000 on initial enquiries. KT summarised that we want to be able to challenge Lambeth properly and protect our position in the event of a formal dispute.

Martin Mulloy (MM) asked if we could retain a surveyor on a permanent basis given the number of issues relating to Major Works – this would be better value in the long run than commissioning multiple, separate studies. KT agreed there could be a case for that, and that we are talking to other TMOs to learn best practice. EW asked about our experience with previous specialist surveys (Simon Green). The answer was that we did successfully secure some concessions, but a single surveyor can't cover all areas (mechanical, electrical, etc.). EW and MM felt that £5,000 was nowhere near enough to cover substantial advice and recommended increasing the pre-authorisation ceiling to £25,000. CA asked if anyone could provide advice on who to approach. MM said that Landers had provided good reports to us in the past. FM asked what, fundamentally, we are trying to get out of this. Ultimately, we want the system reviewed so it functions properly. EW said the problem was more fundamental: is the system fit for purpose; if not, what can we do? A question was asked about whether we have the original design specification. FM replied that we do. EW said we needed to spend restricted surplus funds and the current poor performance of the system is intolerable. MJ said an added benefit of any action arising from this work would be that it makes Lambeth take us more seriously when it comes to the upcoming works.

The following proposal was put to a **VOTE**: for the MC to be able to authorise expenditure from the Restricted Surplus Funds of up to £25,000 for independent professional reports on the performance of the Estate heating and hot water system, any corrective actions, the previous Major Works in general, and on any related legal matters. The vote passed (Prop: EW, Sec: PCr, In favour: 24, Against: 0, Abstentions: 6).

DRAFT

9. Request to approve the use of restricted surplus funds to cover the cost of an oral history group in advance of WMHC's 50th anniversary

CA explained that the MC had been looking at ways to commemorate the Estate's 50th anniversary in December 2025 and had been reviewing the estate archives. There are 20 households on the estate that have been here since its foundation, and the MC really want to capture the history and experiences of these residents. This will be an important piece of social history that will nurture community cohesion and pride in our estate. The MC applied for a £5,000 community grant to cover fortnightly room hire and volunteer training (there are lots of short courses costing around £150). Unfortunately the application was unsuccessful, so now the MC are requesting these funds from the Restricted Surplus.

BS asked what the outcomes would be. We would want to capture the unique characteristics of our community. Any outcomes would also be helpful when dealing with Lambeth regarding works and listing. CA said that we had held a 30th anniversary exhibition at Morley College and that SS had received an award for longstanding service to the co-op. This time, videos, podcasts, and social media posts are possibilities. CA agreed that we are a remarkable example of a successful social housing project and that this work will give us leverage with Lambeth and act as a launchpad for other activities. CF agreed that it could help position us as a special estate in the eyes of Lambeth, and that it would be a lever for further exposure, for example from City Hall. Could we take part in Open House weekend, or run occasional tours?

CA said the oral history group would be just the first part of the 50th anniversary project. PL made the emotional point that we should devote restricted surplus funds to capturing our early history precisely because the only reason the funds exist in the first place is because early residents gave their own labour to running the estate in return for allowances from Lambeth.

The request for £5,000 was put to a **VOTE**, which passed easily (Prop: BS, Sec: CD, In favour: 37, Against: 0, Abstentions: 1).

After the vote, CF, BS, and BSh volunteered to help with setting up the group.

10. AOB

Staying with the 50th anniversary theme, EW asked whether the historic millstones in the large playground could be displayed more prominently. CA explained that the MC had looked into this, but that the stones were too heavy to move without significant cost and disruption. MM disagreed and said he had been told by a stonemason that it was feasible. He asked the MC to reconsider the matter as the stones were important industrial archaeological artifacts. PL thought this was an excellent idea. PL also asked about contacting Oakey Industries, who are now based in India. CA agreed (**ACTION**) and asked for volunteers: MM and Daniel Sincel said yes.

DRAFT

NB said that the rubbish bins in Holst Court were overfull and stinking. CD said they had not been emptied for two weeks. NB said that Abi had been doing really well moving rubbish around, but that it needed to be collected now. RM said that it was due to be collected tomorrow (Good Friday). CA said we should advertise the complaint number on the residents' WhatsApp group (**ACTION**).

A resident commented that delivery people had urinated a lot near the Mead Row steps. RM said she would keep an eye on the situation.

Aleksy Waskowski (AW) noted that the bollards in the car park keep breaking and are badly positioned and need to be pushed back. FM said the MC would consider this at their next meeting.

Meeting finished at 8:55pm