

25 Gresse St. Tenants & Residents' Association

Chairman: Gary Comenas | Secretary: Eddie Bloch | Treasurer: Ezra Benson | DMC: Paul Stelb

Q & A: Tenant Management

Questions: Gary Comenas, Chairman, 25 Gresse St. TRA
Answers: Kim Thompson, Tenant Empowerment Office

There are two options for tenant management of our building – a TMO or LMA.

TMO stands for Tenant Management Organization. A TMO can be set up by the tenants and residents' association to run the block on behalf of the Council. It requires a minimum of 25 Council flats in the building.

LMA stands for Local Management Agreement - a voluntary agreement between the TRA (Tenants & Residents' Ass'n.) and the Council which would enable the tenants and residents' association to take over the management of only one or two services, as opposed to managing the block as a whole.

Both options would require us to become a constituted group either by affiliating to Industrial Provident Society or becoming a Company Ltd by Guarantee and follow the Rules of either the FSA or Companies House.

The differences between a TMO and LMA are outlined during the Q & A. See question no. 11 regarding which would be most appropriate for our block.

A brochure on TMOs and LMAs can be downloaded by clicking on:
http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/cms-service/download/asset?asset_id=2694020.

Q & A

1. At the moment Camden allocates 15 hours per week of cleaning to our block based on the service charge we pay. The service charge is paid by both Council tenants and leaseholders. Would we be allocated more than 15 hours of week of cleaning if we joined the TMO scheme?

If the group were to either to develop as a TMO or negotiate a Local Management Agreement, the Council would assess how much the current level of service actually costs and this would become the amount of allowance the group would receive to provide the same level of service as a minimum or an improved level of service.

2. If Camden is no longer supervising our cleaner, who would?

If TMO - the Management Committee would employ an Estate Co-ordinator to manage all aspects of Housing Management on a day to day basis and they would manage and supervise all other employees or contractors. The Chair of the Management Committee supervises and line manages the Estate Co-ordinator. If LMA - the constituted group would decide amongst themselves who would supervise the cleaner or contractor.

3. Would we have to enter into a contract with a private cleaner? If so, what happens if the current tenants and association changes officers or is disbanded? Would we have to start a limited company in order to contract a private cleaner?

I think I have covered this in the above answers.

4. If a private company took over the cleaning and residents wanted to complain about the service, would they still be able to complain to Camden and/or local Councillors as they can do now with the cleaning service provided by Camden?

If the group were to become a TMO the residents would complain about the service to the Estate Co-ordinator employed by the Committee or if LMA - residents would complain to the Management committee. If residents wanted to complain about the TMO or the LMA because they were not satisfied with the way they dealt with their complaint or they wanted to appeal the committee's decision they would contact the Council.

5. Residents currently pay a weekly service charge for caretaking. Both leaseholders and tenants pay this charge. It is not covered by Housing Benefit. Would the money from the service charge be allocated to pay for a private cleaning company or would the funds have to come from elsewhere?

The tenants would still pay their service charges to the Council in their rent as they do now. The Council will provide an allowance based on what it actually costs the Council to provide the service to the block. The allowance is then managed by the management committee. The management committee would then have to keep records of how much they have spent on the service they manage and copies of these are passed to the Council for drawing up the Leaseholder charges. The allowance would consist of an allowance for the leaseholder service based on what it cost the previous year – if the group manage to provide the same service more cheaply the Council will make an adjustment on the allowance the following year.

6. If the cleaning service charge is allocated to pay for a private company, is

the full charge allocated or does Camden retain a portion of the amount for admin. costs? (How much money would we actual receive to pay a private company to do the cleaning?)

It is difficult to ascertain how much the allowance would be at the moment but the Council would retain a portion of the total costs as they have to prepare and verify the leaseholder billing.

7. There are quite a few absentee landlords who own flats in our building and rent them out to private tenants. Does this make a difference? (For instance, one absentee landlord owns about four flats rented privately and another owns two flats etc...)

As they are not Camden Council tenants or leaseholders then they would not be able to become a member of the TMO or LMA which is done by buying a share in the Company which can be as little as 10p. The majority of the TMOs charge £1 per share. The absentee leaseholder still has a say and can become a member which entitles them to vote at AGMs and SGMs.

8. Do you have access to a private cleaning company that could provide us with an estimate of how much it would cost to clean our building privately?

No sorry I don't know of any – the current TMOs have caretaking and cleaning staff and don't use a contractor.

9. At the moment our Council cleaner generally cleans daily, including some weekends, and on occasions we have walkabouts with the caretaking supervisor, invited officials and TRA committee members to pinpoint problem areas in the building. We would hope to continue these walkabouts with the private cleaner so that any contract we had would also have to include these. Is this possible?

The existing TMO Management Committees often carry out regular walkabouts either with the Estate Co-ordinator or on their own and report back to the Co-ordinator. If LMA - the committee would make their own arrangements with their contractor, employee or volunteer to carry have a walkabout. The Council would carry out monitoring inspections twice a year to ensure the service levels outlined in the Agreement were being maintained.

10. If we had an urgent cleaning problem i.e. if a resident made a mess of a floor or dirtied the lift, would we be able to contact the private company in the way that we are currently able to contact the Council, in order to get the cleaner to attend to the building to clean up the mess on an emergency basis, or would we be tied into a specific time frame i.e. would the cleaner only come during certain days and certain hours and it would be up to residents to do any extra cleaning outside those hours?

This is something the Management Committee of the TMO or LMA would need to arrange with either the contractor or employee themselves.

11. Would we have our own TMO, just for this building, or would we become one of the 1,400 properties managed by the seven TMOs already in existence?

If you have more than 25 Camden Council tenanted units in the block then you would have your own TMO just for the building like the other 7 TMOs. If you had less than 25 tenanted units and felt an LMA was not for you – you could think about asking another block close by if they weyou obtained the minimum 25 tenanted units.