



The Leasehold Advisory Service

2021-22 Business Plan

March 2021

Fleetbank House
2-6 Salisbury Square
London
EC4Y 8JX

1.0 Chair and Chief Executive's Foreword

- 1.1 We are pleased to introduce the Leasehold Advisory Service's (LEASE) Business Plan for 2021-22, and at a time in our history where the policy and wider environment has already seen tremendous change.
- 1.2 Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we implemented our contingency plans to become an entirely remote service to leaseholders and park home owners in England and Wales. We continued to ensure that leasehold and park home tenures are widely understood and that ordinary people, experiencing difficulty with their leasehold or park home, received timely and high-quality advice and information.
- 1.3 Leaseholders needing advice about building safety came to us in greater numbers in 2020-21. They raised difficult and sensitive issues around their liability for remediation works, and the potential use of warranties to meet remediation costs for ACM-cladding. It is a complex space, in that customers revealed a need to understand the Government's remediation funds, State Aid, the EWS1 form and fire safety risk assessments, amongst other issues. These potentially cut across service and administration charge liability and how they are addressed by both the lease and the statutory framework.
- 1.4 As set out later in this plan, overall, performance last year was strong, with LEASE meeting key metrics on output and customer feedback. We are serving more customers, including by having more than 1 million individuals visiting our website last year and more than 29,000 enquiries dealt with by our legally qualified advisers. And customers continue to provide us with [very] positive feedback on our service, with our average score from customer surveys at 4.6 out of 5. However, as will be noted in our goals for 2021-22 we will not rest on our laurels but look to embrace the challenge of doing even better.
- 1.5 We have also provided free e-learning for over 2,000 registered users, a dedicated park homes website and collaborated with organisations like the Federation of Private Residents Associations and Rightmove to help leaseholders and prospective leaseholders respectively. Our team has worked hard to assist groups of customers, particularly those in high rise buildings with cladding issues, through out of hours and weekend sessions using Teams or Zoom.
- 1.5 Over the next twelve months we will continue to focus on delivering high quality services to our customers, look to serve more new customers but to also understand why our previous customers came to us, and what they did with our advice, in order to look at service changes to better meet their needs.
- 1.6 As we look forward, we would like to pay tribute to all our staff who have worked so hard to provide empathetic and high-quality and free advice that supports our customers. The need for our service continues, in the most challenging and unprecedented of times. We are confident that LEASE will continue to deliver at this key time.



Wanda Goldwag
Chair



Anthony Essien
Chief Executive

2.0 Who we are

- 2.1 LEASE was established in 1994, and remains a non-statutory company limited by guarantee. It is an Executive Departmental Public Body (Or Arm's Length Body) sponsored by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to provide advice to leaseholders and park home owners in England and Wales, including on building safety issues.
- 2.2 LEASE is governed by a board appointed by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. The majority of funding is grant in aid from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG); and it also receives some funding from the Welsh Government (WG).
- 2.4 LEASE is accountable to MHCLG for the use of resources and performance. The relationship is set out in a Management Statement and Financial Memorandum that operate as framework documents and bi-monthly meetings attended by LEASE and MHCLG officials are held to review performance, risks and the use of financial and other resources.
- 2.5 LEASE reports quarterly to the Welsh Government on its performance against the objectives set for the year. Our objectives for Wales in 2021-22 and service levels are listed below:
- Complete 550 enquiries
 - Hold 4 outreach events
 - Achieve 28,000 unique website visitors
 - Complete 75% of written enquiries within 10 working days
 - Average 4.5 out of 5 for customer survey scores
- 2.6 LEASE's Board provides leadership and strategic direction and supervises the overall management of LEASE's activities. The Board has two sub-committees:
- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, with three non-executive members, which reviews the completeness, reliability and integrity of the assurance framework and advises the LEASE CEO as Accounting Officer for LEASE and the Board; and
 - Remuneration Committee, with three non-executive members, which determines pay and related matters, reviews performance appraisal frameworks and assists in the recruitment of senior staff.

3.0 What we do

- 3.1 Leasehold and park homes ownership are both complex tenures where individuals often need assistance to understand the rights and responsibilities that affect how they enjoy their property.
- 3.2 As shown by LEASE data, the breadth of the resulting issues is significant, and LEASE supports improved general understanding of key principles and processes through our detailed online resources. We do this not only through our advice services, but also in supporting policy discussions and consultations by government and others in the sector that have implications for our leaseholder, including those in high rise residential buildings, and park home customers.
- 3.3 As a national organisation, reach across England and Wales is vital, and our online service provides 24-hour digital resource for customers. Then self-service offer includes:
- Online tools, e.g. lease extension calculator;
 - Template documents to assist leaseholders and others engage with third parties, e.g. Participation Agreement for collective enfranchisement;
 - First Tier Tribunal and Leasehold Valuation Tribunal decisions; and
 - Free E-learning for directors, and aspiring directors, of resident management companies.

- 3.4 In many cases leaseholders and parkhome owners need specific advice on their individual circumstances and options, including interpretation of clauses in their lease or park home agreement. The LEASE enquiry service meets this need by allowing individuals to submit a written enquiry or book a fifteen-minute telephone call with one of our legally qualified advisers who provide independent and impartial initial advice. Many customers choose to provide their lease or park home agreement to support this process.
- 3.5 Responses to enquiries are designed to empower LEASE customers to take informed decisions on next steps and the duration of appointments reflects the fact that LEASE offers initial advice only and not a full casework service.
- 3.6 Our remit is exclusively focused on leaseholders, including those in high rise residential buildings, and park home owners.

Vision, Mission and Values

- 3.7 **Our vision** is for LEASE to be trusted and well-known source for free, initial high quality and factual leasehold and park home advice and information.
- 3.8 **Our mission** is to empower leaseholders and park home owners by providing initial advice and information which helps them understand their rights and responsibilities and enables them to engage more confidently with third parties like freeholders, managing agents and site owners.
- 3.9 We will meet the challenges of our mission through services that include:

Online resources	Outreach	Enquiry Service	Partner Referral	Government
Dedicated websites for leasehold and park home issues containing detailed advice guides and FAQs, along with other resources. ,	Outreach work across England and Wales, to assist groups of leaseholders coming together as a community to address their leasehold or park home problems through advice and workshop sessions.	Providing case specific initial advice to leaseholders and park home owners, including on building safety issues. Either by telephone ,email and letter.	We operate a referral channel with other associated organisations, to redirect advice and help referred leaseholders and park home owners.	Assisting Government bodies and other agencies on leasehold and park home policy issues through policy reviews, publications and articles.

- 3.10 We are the Government's service for advising leasehold home owners and park home owners. Staffed by legally qualified advisers who have the knowledge and skill base to answer their enquiries, and to clear a path through the complex thicket of residential leasehold and park homes law so that customers can engage on these matters from an informed perspective and with greater confidence. We also provide information to prospective leaseholders and park home owners about the nature of the tenures through our website and online resources.

Our values

- 3.11 To achieve our mission and objectives, we need to be customer focused and an organisation that embraces learning, development and change. This way of working is embedded in our values:
 - ambition we always strive for more and believe in better
 - quality we offer a professional service to our customers and with high standards
 - diverse we value everybody as an individual
 - learning we can always do better and share what we know

4.0 Operational context

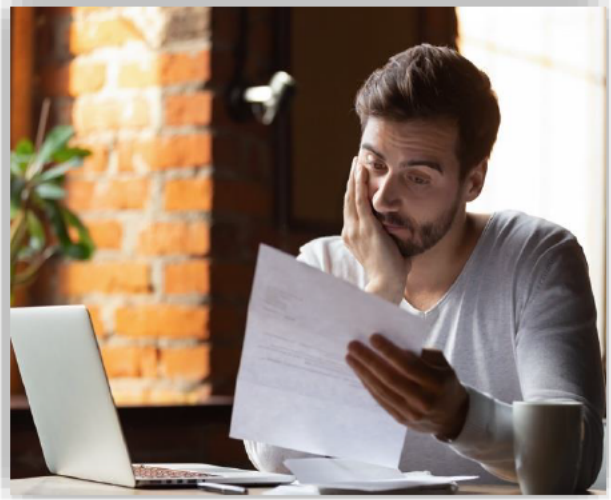
- 4.1 We work within an operating environment that is influenced by a combination of conditions, circumstances and influences.
- 4.2 With COVID19 continuing as the national issue for all organisations, we will need to embrace 'future of work' approaches and ensure that our staff, systems and processes are equipped to continue to provide a high-quality service.

“Service charge demands have arrived on my doormat.”

Such demands may be for large amounts and include detailed information. So, both a financial stretch for leaseholders and difficult to understand.

“There aren’t many years left to go on my lease.”

It needs to be extended. How to go about this and what is involved? What will the leaseholder have to pay for and how long will it all take?



Leasehold

- 4.3 Over a number of decades, legislation has sought to address the imbalance of rights and responsibilities between leaseholder and freeholder bearing in mind each of their interests in the property, and with a view to preventing abuses from occurring and promoting good management. Both English and Welsh Governments have made plain their intent to change leasehold to make it fair for leaseholders.
- 4.4 In England alone, the Government has committed to promoting fairness and transparency for homeowners and ensuring that consumers are protected from abuse and poor service. It is taking forward a comprehensive programme of reform to end unfair practices in the leasehold market, starting with bringing forward legislation in the upcoming session to set ground rents on newly created leases to zero. This will be the first part of seminal two-part legislation to implement reforms in this Parliament, including major reforms to the enfranchisement process to make it easier, simpler and cheaper for leaseholders to extend their lease. It has also committed to establishing a new Commonhold Council as a partnership of industry, leaseholders and Government that will prepare homeowners and the market for the widespread take-up of commonhold.

Fire Safety

- 4.5 Following the Grenfell tragedy, the English government has continued to fund LEASE to specifically support leaseholders affected by fire safety issues. The Government is providing £5 billion to fully fund the cost of replacing unsafe cladding for all leaseholders in residential buildings 18 metres (6 storeys) and over in England. This is in addition to a Waking Watch Relief Fund to pay for the installation of fire alarm systems in high-rise buildings with cladding, removing or reducing the need for interim safety measures such as 'waking watch' which can be costly for leaseholders.
- 4.6 The draft Building Safety Bill has been published. The Bill builds on the recommendations from Dame Judith Hackitt's Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety.

- 4.7 The Fire Safety Act 2021 amends the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and provides greater clarity over responsibility for fire safety in buildings containing more than one home.
- 4.8 Our dedicated fire safety advisers will continue to assist customers on these and other fire safety issues. They have already posted tailored articles, FAQs and factsheets on our website covering, amongst other things, remediation funds, EWS1 forms, fire risk assessments, fire safety regulations and waking watch.

Park Homes

- 4.9 In England, there are an estimated 180,000 people living in 85,000 households across 2,000 sites. In Wales there are an estimated 5,000 people whose full-time residence is a park home. They live in 2,000 such households spread across 92 sites.
- 4.10 Like leasehold, the legal framework setting out the statutory duties and rights of park homes owners is complex, as can be the written agreement between these two parties. In 2018, following a review of park homes legislation in England, the government gave a commitment to introduce a fit and proper person test for site licence holders or the person appointed to manage the site. The purpose of the test is to improve the standards of park home site management.



Commonhold

- 4.11 The government is also now establishing a Commonhold Council - a partnership of leasehold groups, industry and government - that will prepare homeowners and the market for the widespread take-up of commonhold.

The commonhold model is widely used around the world and allows homeowners to own their property on a freehold basis, giving them greater control over the costs of home ownership. Blocks are jointly owned and managed, meaning when someone buys a flat or a house, it is truly theirs and any decisions about its future are theirs too.

5.0 Performance in 2020-21

Key Performance Indicator	Target	Results
Unique website visitors (UK)	1 million	1.2 million
Advice guide downloads	825,000	840,000
Leasehold enquiries	25,000	25,777
Fire Safety Enquiries	1,440	2,000
Park Homes enquiries	1,500	1,040
Wales enquiries	414	476
% written enquiries completed in 10 working days	75%	74%
Customer satisfaction surveys	Avg. score 4.5 out of 5.0	Written: 4.5 Telephone: 4.6

Table 1

6.0 LEASE's Goals for 2021-22

6.1 LEASE's Board has agreed its priorities for 2021-22, supported by activities and target metrics to provide a clear measure of performance. Our goals are set out below.

- Deliver high quality initial advice to leaseholders and park home owners, including on building safety.
- Grow the service whilst continuing to increase its effectiveness in empowering customers.
- Inform the sector, and MHCLG, about the priority issues our customers bring to us and use this insight to adapt LEASE's activities and inform MHCLG policy development.
- Provide a flexible service which allows customers to have their needs met as quickly as possible, either through our online resources or case specific advice where needed
- Develop LEASE as an organisation so that it helps staff to thrive and develop their careers

#	Objective	Metrics
1	Deliver high quality and effective initial advice to leaseholders and park home owners in England and Wales , including on building safety.	<p>A - Achieve an average of 4.5 out of 5 in customer satisfaction surveys</p> <p>B - Understand and improve the proportion of customers who took further action following LEASE advice, the outcomes they secured and how LEASE advice supported this*</p>
2	Increase awareness of the availability of the LEASE advice and information service	<p>A Complete more than 28,700 enquiries from leaseholders and park home owners in 2021/22, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 28,000 from individuals residing in England • 550 from individuals residing in Wales <p>B – Increasing the number of enquiries on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leasehold by so that more than 27,000 is achieved in 2021/22 • Park homes by so that more than 1,120 is achieved in 2021/22 • Building Safety so that more than 2,100 is achieved in 2021/22 <p>C – Increase engagement with LEASE online resources, by having:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.25 million visitors to the LEASE website and 1.9 million hits; • 875,000 advice guide downloads • 2,360 e-learning registrations • Increasing average number of website visitors to the fire safety pages to 10,000/month <p>D Increase by 5% the proportion of enquiries in 2021/22 made by individuals who have not sought advice from LEASE before.</p>
3	Provide a flexible service which allows customers to have their needs as quickly as possible, either through our online resources or case specific advice where needed	<p>A – Understand and increase the proportion of telephone and written enquiry customers who accessed FAQ or advice guides, but then went on to book a telephone appointment.</p> <p>B – Address enquiries to the following timescales:**</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • response issued to 75% of written enquiries 10 working days* • 90% of telephone appointments held within two working days of a customer requesting a telephone session.

4	Inform the sector, and MHCLG, about the priority issues our customers bring to us and use this insight to adapt LEASE's activities.	A – Continue to publish LEASE's quarterly enquiry data throughout 2021-22.
		B – Gather additional information to support business development, including information on what customers are hoping to achieve through seeking advice
5	Develop LEASE as an organisation so that it helps staff to thrive and develop their careers	A - By 31 st March 2022 improve previous staff survey score in areas below central government average, by 5%.

*a metric around improving the proportion of customers who felt LEASE advice supported their final case outcome may be introduced once a baseline has been established

** These metrics may change in 2021/22

7.0 **Resources**

Financial

- 7.1 LEASE is funded by grant-in-aid provided by MHCLG and WG, and our financial aim is to break even over the course of the year. We recognise the need to show value for money and we are keen to ensure that the approach to the management of resources and assets is linked to achieving our business plan objectives.
- 7.2 In 2021/22 LEASE will receive a flat cash budget settlement of £1.922 million, this means doing more with less and is a driver for us to become even more efficient and leverage our resources through partnership working and targeted coproduction,
- 7.3 Due consideration is given to minimising the costs of all resources used, whilst having continual regard to quality. LEASE monitors various KPIs to ensure that objectives are achieved, and that LEASE remains an effective organisation.

	2021-22 ('000)
Income	
MHCLG	1,922
WG	52
Total income	1,974
Expenditure	
Pay	1,370
Operating costs	552
Total expenditure	1,922

Table 2

Personnel

- 7.3 LEASE employs 26 staff (24.7 FTE) made up principally of legally qualified advisers. The Annex to this plan sets out the intended organisational structure in 2021-22.
- 7.4 LEASE is committed to fair and open competition and selection on merit. We promote equality of opportunity for all staff irrespective of their race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation or religion. We also seek to provide effective and appropriate learning and development opportunities to help all staff fulfil their individual and team potential.

- 7.5 We recognise that LEASE is an attractive platform for those who are beginning their careers. As such we expect them to come and develop excellent specialist knowledge and skills, and in that way we can help to propel our staff to the next phase of their careers.
- 7.6 For all our staff, LEASE will continue to support and recognise the importance of the reasonable work life balance aspirations that COVID-19 has shown in sharp relief is critical to staff wellbeing. We are committed to this and the continual development of staff thereby ensuring a fit for purpose organisation.

8.0 Equality and diversity

- 8.1 We know that we cannot achieve our mission unless we create a workforce that represents and draws on all of the skills of the society we live in and we are proud to be an equal opportunities employer. We want to be an organisation where people feel not only comfortable sharing their true selves but valued for the experience and diversity they bring to work.

9.0 Managing risk

- 9.1 Operational and delivery risk:
COVID-19 will continue to require us to focus on supporting our staff and executing our contingency plan to continue to deliver services remotely and all whilst looking to help people. The increased risk this presents to a small team serving over 4 million leaseholders and 185,000 park home residents will be mitigated by continuing to drive traffic to our website, investing in our staff, and by learning from our customers as we adapt services to serve them better and more effectively.

As a Government body, we are subject to a high level of public scrutiny and accountability. Our reputation and credibility are critical to our success. To effectively manage potential reputational and conduct risks, our risk management framework is designed to provide a disciplined and structured approach to identifying, assessing and managing risk.

Annex: LEASE Board and Organisational Chart



Wanda Goldwag
(Chair)



Victoria Elvidge
(Director and Remuneration Committee Chair)



Steven Jackson
(Director and Audit & Risk Committee Chair)

