



**FIRST-TIER TRIBUNAL
PROPERTY CHAMBER
(RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY)**

Case Reference : CHI/43UK/LDC/2021/0099

Property : St Michaels, Wolfs Row, Oxted, Surrey,
RH8 0QL

Applicant : St Michaels Limited

Representative : Alexandre Boyes

Respondent :

Representative :

Type of Application : To dispense with the requirement to
consult lessees about major works section
20ZA of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985

Tribunal Member : D Banfield FRICS
Regional Surveyor

Date of Decision : 22 November 2021 in accordance with rule
6A of the Tribunal Procedure Rules 2013 as
amended by The Tribunal Procedure
(Coronavirus) Amendment Rules 2020 SI
2020 No 406 L11.

DECISION

The Tribunal grants dispensation from the consultation requirements of S.20 Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 in respect of works to upgrade the fire alarm system.

In granting dispensation, the Tribunal makes no determination as to whether any service charge costs are reasonable or payable.

The Applicant is to send a copy of this determination to the Lessees.

Background

1. The Applicant seeks dispensation under Section 20ZA of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 from the consultation requirements imposed on the landlord by Section 20 of the 1985 Act.
2. The Applicant explains that *“the fire alarm at the property needs upgrading and following some recent false alarms this needs to be rectified with some urgency”*. *“We feel the safety of the residents is paramount and therefore deem it unreasonable to wait the minimum of 60 days to have this work carried out.”*
3. The Tribunal made Directions on 26 October 2021 indicating that the Tribunal considered that the application was suitable to be determined on the papers without a hearing in accordance with rule 6A of the Tribunal Procedure Rules 2013 as amended by The Tribunal Procedure (Coronavirus) Amendment Rules 2020 SI 2020 No 406 L11.
4. The Tribunal required the Applicant to send to the Respondents its Directions together with a copy of the Application and a form to indicate whether they agreed with or objected to the application and if they objected to send their reasons to the Applicant and Tribunal.
5. It was indicated that those lessees who agreed to the application or failed to respond would be removed as Respondents.
6. No replies were received and as indicated above the lessees have been removed as respondents.
7. No requests for an oral hearing were made and the matter is therefore determined on the papers in accordance with Rule 31 of the Tribunal’s Procedural Rules.
8. Before making this determination, the papers received were examined to determine whether the issues remained capable of determination without an oral hearing and it was decided that they were, given that the application remained unchallenged.
9. The only issue for the Tribunal is whether it is reasonable to dispense with any statutory consultation requirements. This decision does not concern the issue of whether any service charge costs will be reasonable or payable.

The Law

10. The relevant section of the Act reads as follows:

S.20 ZA Consultation requirements:

Where an application is made to a Leasehold Valuation Tribunal for a determination to dispense with all or any of the consultation requirements in relation to any qualifying works or qualifying long-term agreement, the Tribunal may make the determination if satisfied that it is reasonable to dispense with the requirements.

11. The matter was examined in some detail by the Supreme Court in the case of *Daejan Investments Ltd v Benson*. In summary the Supreme Court noted the following
 - i. The main question for the Tribunal when considering how to exercise its jurisdiction in accordance with section 20ZA is the real prejudice to the tenants flowing from the landlord's breach of the consultation requirements.
 - ii. The financial consequence to the landlord of not granting a dispensation is not a relevant factor. The nature of the landlord is not a relevant factor.
 - iii. Dispensation should not be refused solely because the landlord seriously breached, or departed from, the consultation requirements.
 - iv. The Tribunal has power to grant a dispensation as it thinks fit, provided that any terms are appropriate.
 - v. The Tribunal has power to impose a condition that the landlord pays the tenants' reasonable costs (including surveyor and/or legal fees) incurred in connection with the landlord's application under section 20ZA (1).
 - vi. The legal burden of proof in relation to dispensation applications is on the landlord. The factual burden of identifying some "relevant" prejudice that they would or might have suffered is on the tenants.
 - vii. The court considered that "relevant" prejudice should be given a narrow definition; it means whether non-compliance with the consultation requirements has led the landlord to incur costs in an unreasonable amount or to incur them in the provision of services, or in the carrying out of works, which fell below a reasonable standard, in other words whether the non-compliance has in that sense caused prejudice to the tenant.
 - viii. The more serious and/or deliberate the landlord's failure, the more readily a Tribunal would be likely to accept that the tenants had suffered prejudice.

- ix. Once the tenants had shown a credible case for prejudice, the Tribunal should look to the landlord to rebut it.

Evidence

12. The reason for the application is set out in paragraph 2 above. In the absence of any objection from the lessees the Applicant has not been required to submit any further evidence and the determination is made on the papers already received.

Determination

13. Dispensation from the consultation requirements of S.20 of the Act may be given where the Tribunal is satisfied that it is reasonable to dispense with those requirements.
14. No objections have been received and therefore no evidence of prejudice as referred to in the Daejan case above has been submitted.
15. In view of the above **the Tribunal grants dispensation from the consultation requirements of S.20 Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 in respect of works to upgrade the fire alarm system.**
16. **In granting dispensation, the Tribunal makes no determination as to whether any service charge costs are reasonable or payable.**
17. **The Applicant is to send a copy of this determination to the Lessees.**

D Banfield FRICS
22 November 2021

RIGHTS OF APPEAL

1. A person wishing to appeal this decision to the Upper Tribunal (Lands Chamber) must seek permission to do so by making written application by email to rpsouthern@justice.gov.uk to the First-tier Tribunal at the Regional office which has been dealing with the case.
2. The application must arrive at the Tribunal within 28 days after the Tribunal sends to the person making the application written reasons for the decision.

3. If the person wishing to appeal does not comply with the 28 day time limit, the person shall include with the application for permission to appeal a request for an extension of time and the reason for not complying with the 28 day time limit; the Tribunal will then decide whether to extend time or not to allow the application for permission to appeal to proceed.
4. The application for permission to appeal must identify the decision of the Tribunal to which it relates, state the grounds of appeal, and state the result the party making the application is seeking.