
**SOUTH LAKES HOUSING
LEASEHOLD SERVICE IMPROVEMENT GROUP MEETING**



**Minutes of Meeting held on 14 July 2009 at 3.00 p.m.
At Little Aynam House, Kendal**

Present: S Mallinson Leasehold Manager, SLH (Chair)
S Duffy Community Participation Coordinator, SLH
Cllr Hodson SLH Board Director and SLDC Cllr
Ms Dorothy Dixon 44 Waterside, Kendal
Mrs Joan Chadwick 4 High Tenterfell Court, Kendal, Tenant
Board Director
Mr J Atkinson 20 Sedbergh Drive, Kendal
Mr Alan Mark 6 Longlands View, Kendal
Tim Keegan 6 Applerigg, Kendal
Ms A Dickinson 5 Jennings Terrace, Kendal
Mrs D Thornton 7 Jennings Terrace, Kendal

Apologies: Vince Carter
Trevor Woodward
Tom Lynch

Circulation: All
Maureen Pearson
Pauline Keeley

Copy to: Peter Thomas

Subject	Action
1.0 Minutes of last meeting	

Minutes for Leaseholder SIG of 17 February 2009 were declared a true record. Sue Mallinson confirmed that she had been taken ill before the meeting scheduled for May.

Sue told the members that she is leaving the employ of South Lakes Housing and finishes in three week's time.

2.0 Matters arising

Waterside sheds – SD to email Lynne Huxley to see if any progress had been made.

There was a discussion about anti-social behaviour involving violence, and how residents can in such situations be fearful of reprisals. Suzy said that SLH's Anti-social behaviour (ASB) policy had been drawn up with the assistance of a prominent ASB specialist, Bill Pitt MBE, who had had success in battling bad behaviour in Manchester. The policy is regarded as being robust and comprehensive. The Group enquired about when the policy was due for review, and commented that the policy needs to be robust as possible, and acted upon promptly.

3.0 Election of leaseholder Chairman for the SIG

None of the members of the SIG are interested in taking the Chair at this moment. It was agreed that the matter should be tabled again at the next full

SD

meeting of the Group on 24 November 2009.

4.0 Leasehold Satisfaction Survey

Sue ran through the figures from the last survey and said that SLH is pleased with the overall improvement in results. The survey will be carried out annually. In particular Sue highlighted improvements in:

- Number of surveys returned
- Satisfaction with information
- Satisfaction with service in general

Sue commented that leaseholders are always ready to question the value for money (VFM) for their service charges and this keeps SLH on its toes.

John Atkinson questioned how costs are allocated to invoices. Sue explained that the tradesperson books time costs, material costs and so on, but that for the moment SLH does not charge overheads such as petrol and the costs of vehicles. Costs may in fact rise if these costs are included in future. Sue also added that SLH has to use approved contractors who have public liability insurance etc as set out in SLH's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

5.0 Buildings insurance – a discussion

Sue Mallinson explained that a leaseholder is dissatisfied with the way SLDC deals with her buildings insurance. There are three issues here:

1. Clauses in the lease effectively mean that some flats may be inadequately insured if a fire or some other peril should occur
2. Leases should all be the same in the way that they refer to buildings insurance
3. That the clause in the leases allowing SLDC not to rebuild after disaster, should they so choose, should be removed.

The Group discussed the issues at length and agreed to ask the following questions of the Council:

- By the end of 2009, get the valuation surveys complete and convey the valuations to leaseholders
- Are there differences in the leases?
- Is Martin Mason a 'broker' and is there a commission charge hidden with the annual buildings insurance premium charged to leaseholders
- Where in the lease does it state that leaseholders are responsible for ensuring that the insured value is adequate, in between SLDC valuations, at their own cost

Answers to these questions to be published in the next available newsletter.

6.0 Leaseholder annual administration fee

Sue M said that South Lakes Housing is a member of the Leasehold Excellence Network (LEN). This Group has been looking at annual administration charges and a list was reviewed. Sue explained that SLH's overheads for all the staff involved in the Leasehold service were currently not charged to leaseholders, for example, repairs clerks, maintenance surveyors, staff support for consultation and involvement, Leasehold Manager. A percentage of the salaries of the front line staff involved in the service had been used to develop the figures, and on that basis the overhead cost to leaseholders of the service should be £111.33 per year. No account had been taken of the time spent by senior staff such as the Chief Executive. Sue asked if the SIG would agree that a charge for overheads based on these calculations should be invoiced in 2010-11. A discussion around this issue took place and the Group felt that it was more important than ever for SLH to keep costs down as far as possible, **and there was a general acceptance that overhead costs ought to be borne by the leaseholder.**

It was agreed that the reason for the large increase should be fully explained in a

letter accompanying the bill when it goes out. Sue agreed to draft one before she leaves. As there are likely to be a lot of telephone calls regarding the admin fee Tim Keegan asked that **Management Team ensure that Pauline Keeley receives additional support at that time** as she is the frontline leasehold contact.

Tim Keegan mentioned that during his queries to Pauline Keeley, who organises the invoices, he felt Pauline's service had been brilliant, and expressed the Group's appreciation of staff efforts to deliver the leaseholder service.

The Group enquired how charges were made for separate repair jobs, and Sue explained that information was brought together from repairs data and the finance system to raise an invoice. SLDC had required SLH to issue invoices in accordance with the lease, which is on 1st April every year. Sue explained that with current legislation this was impossible as we are required to charge for actual works carried out. The costs of these will only be known once the job has been completed. Sue confirmed that having trialled issuing estimated bills at the start of the year and revising these based on actual costs at the end of the year in order to try to comply with SLDC's lease, SLH would be reverting to a twice-yearly billing in arrears. This is the most satisfactory frequency for all concerned. **The group agreed that this would be the best practical approach to invoicing.** Sue also said that if leaseholders wanted to pay over the year by standing order, to reduce the impact of that bill, they could do so and should contact Pauline Keeley.

7.0 Recouping SLH costs for the Right to Buy process

Sue explained that historically, SLH had borne costs for the right to buy process, for example staffing and administration costs, providing references etc. Sue proposed that these costs should in future be charged to the purchaser via their Solicitor. **This change in practice was agreed.**

8.0 SLH Whistleblowing policy

Sue had mentioned at the last meeting that the Group would be given the opportunity to have a look at SLH policies, often whilst they were still in development.

This policy is about all staff, tenants, and leaseholders knowing about the proper procedure to report any wrongdoing. Although this particular policy had already been to Tenants' Committee and the Board it was planned that Leaseholders would have a say in the development of policies in the future, probably through a Service Improvement Group. (SIG)

9.0 Leaseholder Open Event 3 – 7pm 29 September 2009

South Lakes Housing News

Suzy said that Dorothy Dixon is a member of Reader Panel, who read publications in advance to see if they are clear, easy to read and understand. Dorothy had pointed out that a newsletter article about 30-minute fire doors was incorrect, or not specific enough. Unfortunately this had not been picked up in the final version of the newsletter. Suzy apologised to the Group for this, and said that she would work with Trevor Woodward to put an accurate guide to this topic in the next newsletter.

The Group asked that Sue's leaving SLH be featured in the newsletter along with information about who is managing the leasehold service in the interim.

10 Training Course

Sue told the Group about an excellent training course staff had attended about the

s.20 consultation for leaseholders (s.20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 refers) and briefly outlined what the course was about. Leaseholders are recommended to have a look at the advice on the LEASE website to get a flavour of the consultation work SLH and other landlords are tasked with as a result of this legislation.

Suzy said SLH's training programme for tenants has appeared in the newsletter and Leaseholders were most welcome to come along if any particular topic appealed to them.

11 Any other business

Members enquired about the letting of the Grounds Maintenance contract, and Sue said that SLH works were part of a larger contract held by SLDC. SLDC had been due to relet the contract from April 2009, and had now proposed that this be put back until April 2010/11.

The Group thanked Sue Mallinson for her hard work in supporting the SIG and wished her all the best for her future.

Dates of next meetings

Open event 3 – 7pm 29 September, Kendal Town Hall
LESIG 3pm Tuesday 24 November 2009.