

**SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES
THURSDAY 20 JANUARY 2011 AT 10.30 HRS
HELD AT
THE RESOURCE CENTRE, LITTLE AYNAM HOUSE, KENDAL**

Present: Tenants
Margaret Pritchard (Chair)
John Short
Charles Howarth
Doone Ward
Joan Chadwick
Dorothy Dixon
Ron Pritchard
Anne Corbett
Margaret Akrigg
Robin Martakies
Annice Lewis

Sara Brown- Tenant Observer

Officers in attendance: John Mansergh- Performance Manager, SLH
John Stirling- Tenant Participation Officer, SLH
Sandy Ryder- Finance Manager, SLH (part)
David Sykes- Interim Director (Communities) SLDC (part)
Martin Keyes- Financial Services Officer, SLDC (part)
Jacqui Blenkinship- Interim Director of Asset Management, SLH (part)

Apologies: Win Sayers
Peter Bland
Phyllis Tweedale
Janet Cherry
Patricia Stoodley
Helen Smith- Strategic Finance Manager, SLDC

John Stirling reported that Colin Hesketh had resigned from the Committee on 4 January 2011.

Margaret welcomed Sara Brown who was attending her first meeting of the Committee.

Circulation: As above

Action

681 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 28 October 2010

Agreed as a true record.

682 Matters Arising

None.

683 SLH Board Minutes (4 November 2010)

Board minutes 919 and 923- John Short asked about training in Tenant Scrutiny for Board members. John Mansergh replied that training would now be provided in house and not by an external body. The new government was keen for all local government decisions to be scrutinised at a local level as part of their transparency agenda. The Stock Options Survey questionnaire showed that approximately 700 tenants wished to be involved in scrutiny, and it was now our responsibility to ask them how they wished to get involved.

Dorothy Dixon asked for clarification about the process for 'Residents Questions'. Sandy Ryder said that the questions were usually posed in writing, and a written answer would normally follow. Staff were available to assist a resident prepare a written question. Joan Chadwick reminded the Committee that their annual report reminded residents of the facility to ask searching questions of the Board.

Board minute 923- Robin Martakies asked about the identification of floor tiles that contained asbestos. Ron Pritchard said that recent years had seen an increase in identification of products containing asbestos. Dorothy Dixon asked about the time and effort required to remove floor tiles in a property near her as some residents had been alarmed at the precautions taken by the contractors. John Mansergh said that new guidance was issued to all social landlords in April 2010 together with a toolkit of options to assist with the process for removal of asbestos from properties if needed. The first part of the process was to gather comprehensive information about the location of asbestos and the associated risks to health. Void properties were being tested as part of the information gathering stage. It was planned to produce a leaflet for the information of tenants and this would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee. A growth bid of £150,000 had been accepted by SLDC to enable a full survey to be carried out over the next 2 years, which was great news. Only very small quantities of asbestos had been found to date.

684 SLH Board Agenda

Item 4.2 (Q3 Performance Report) - the Committee noted that good progress had been made in all areas except asbestos.

The Committee adjourned this item to allow officers to make their presentations.

685 Housing Revenue Account

David Sykes thanked the Committee for giving him the opportunity to capture the views of tenants prior to Cabinet making a final decision on 9 February. He said that SLDC was in a period of significant change, as the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) did not have the long term resources to maintain homes to the 'Decent' standard. There was an expectation that government would require all Local Authorities to have a self financing HRA from April 2012, although the final settlement figures had not yet been received. A bid for £542,000 had been made to Communities and Local Government (CLG) to allow a backlog of homes to be brought up to the 'Decent' standard. Control of the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) had been transferred from SLDC to SLH and this represented a continued delegation of responsibilities. Government had also deferred the final date for the convergence of Council and Housing Association rents to 2015-16.

The formula for rent increases was set by government, not SLDC, and using the formula an increase of 5.1% plus £2 per week gave an overall average increase of 7.6%, meaning that an average rent would rise to £77.34 per week. The subsidy paid to government would rise by £627,000 to a total of £4.055,000. There was some capacity in the 2011/12 budget to fund additional Stock Options work which may be needed and subject to supplementary revenue estimate. Work on setting other fees and charges was still in progress. The funding of the Asbestos Survey was built in as a

growth item.

Margaret Akrigg asked about how the rent increase would affect tenants on Housing Benefit (HB), Sandy Ryder said that as HB was means tested according to individual circumstances, no general answer could be given.

Robin Martakies referred to the situation 2 years ago when government had changed the formula once rent increase letters had been sent out, resulting in the additional costs of a second letter. David Sykes said that those concerns had been raised with government and based on his current knowledge there was no suggestion that this situation would occur this year.

Robin Martakies said that the negative subsidy paid to government was unfair to tenants of SLDC. Sandy Ryder said that this was why a thorough review of the current HRA system was needed.

John Short asked why government websites showed an increase in Council rents of 6.8%, but the increase in South Lakeland was 7.6%. David Sykes said that the government figures were an average for the whole country.

Charles Howarth said that the increase in rents payable to SLDC resulted in even greater payments to government showed the unfairness of the current arrangements, and asked what steps were SLDC taking to change the situation. David Sykes said that senior political leaders of the Council, supported by senior management had recently visited Andrew Stunnel MP, Minister in the DCLG, to press the case for reform using actual figures, not remote modelling. A follow up letter had been drafted to be sent to the Minister and the comments from Tenants Committee would be added. Tenants Committee would be provided with a copy of the letter.

Charles Howarth asked that future papers used the term 'payment free' not 'rent free'.

The Committee thanked David Sykes and Martin Keyes for the clarity of their explanations.

686 Interim Business Plan and Budget Strategy

John Mansergh said that in light of the expected HRA settlement figures, SLH was expecting to be paid a Management Fee by SLDC at the same level as the previous year. The Fee would not take account of inflationary pressures and in reality meant that SLH had to do more for less. To take this forward, the usual 5 year business plan had been scrapped and replaced with a 1 year interim plan. The plan concentrated on reducing back office costs and putting the savings into front line services which had a direct bearing on tenants. It was anticipated that there would be an overall reduction of 5 employees, but it was hoped to manage the process without resorting to compulsory redundancies.

JSt

The Interim Business Plan raised the following issues-

Robin Martakies

page 46- (estate inspections), did the figure of 25 refer to Council owned properties, or the whole estate?

page 48 (opportunities to participate in decision making), how frequently would this be reviewed?

Page 62- (Tenant-led Self Regulation), was unclear

Would the employment of staff aged over 65 years be terminated?

In response, John Mansergh said that the opportunities to participate indicators was part of a triennial survey, and he would re-write the Tenant-led Self Regulation passage to reflect the recent District Wide Tenant Participation Agreement, which better reflected the wishes of Tenants Committee. The termination of employment of any member of staff was subject to legal requirement, and SLH would comply with the

law.

Ron Pritchard

Does the background to the Interim Business Plan suggest that SLH is overstaffed, and will remaining staff be overworked?

Can Repairs Operatives conduct safety inspections of communal areas as opposed to creating a dedicated post?

John Mansergh said that benchmarking evidence showed that we were not over staffed, and it was expected that remaining staff would not be over worked as SLH would be dropping some work currently undertaken and would be working smarter.

Jacqui Blenkinship said that the safety inspections of communal areas had to be a formal process at regular intervals and not reliant on a repair being reported nearby.

687 External Painting Programme

Jacqui Blenkinship explained that the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) was used to fund items of significant expenditure such as replacement roofs and kitchens etc., but not repairs to part of a kitchen. Some of the money allocated to external painting would be used to replace wooden fascias etc with plastic, to avoid future painting costs. A 7 year programme of painting and replacement had been identified with the properties in most urgent need being attended to first. Although the budget was certain for the first year, there was no guarantee that future funds would be available. John Short drew attention to the portion of the budget allocated Helm Close. Jacqui Blenkinship said that based on a health and safety risk assessment Helm Close presented the greatest risk.

Charles Howarth said that as a Board member he had experienced difficulty in ascertaining the boundaries of HRA managed land. Jacqui Blenkinship said that maps were currently being overlaid to show public highway and sewer ownership and once they were completed would make these matters easier to resolve.

Dorothy Dixon asked about the painting and re-painting of render. Jacqui Blenkinship said that currently the policy was to re-paint areas already painted, but where whole areas of render had never been painted, to wash down only.

The Committee noted the programme.

684 (continued) Board Agenda

Item 4.2, Robin Martakies asked for-

- a) a list of Residents Associations holding regular meetings.
- b) further information about 'voluntary sector involvement with activities for Sheltered Housing tenants'.

**JSt
GA**

He also asked the Tenant Board Directors to raise the following issues-

- a) to consider the replacement of the current staff final salary pension scheme with a career average scheme. (item 4.3)
- b) that the Maintenance Review had shown SLH to be complacent as the current arrangements had not produced the reductions in staff envisaged. (item 5.1)
- c) paragraph 3.5 of the Complaints Policy was contradictory. (item 6.6)

688 Grounds Maintenance Meeting

SH

The Committee noted the notes of the meeting, and hoped that the booklet proposed for all residents of the area covered by the contract would be published. It was thought that residents would welcome the publication of such information.

Robin Martakies said that responsibility for the piece of land between Kirkfield and Kirkfield Rise was still unclear and asked for further clarification

FH/SH

689 District Wide Tenant Participation Agreement Review

Margaret Pritchard said that the Committee had drawn upon the advice of their Independent Advisor, Jamie Martin and the revised agreement provided a sound footing for Tenant Participation within SLH/SLDC. She thanked members of the Committee for their commitment to meetings with Jamie Martin over recent months, especially during periods of adverse weather.

Proposed by Robin Martakies, seconded by John Short that the revised agreement be formally adopted by the Committee, and recommended for acceptance by the Board of SLH and subsequently SLDC. Subject to their agreement suitable arrangements to be made for a formal signing ceremony.

SD

690 Fairer Future for Social Housing

John Mansergh said that comments made by individual Members of Tenants Committee had been included in the SLH/SLDC response. These responses had then been fed into the Cumbria Housing Strategy Manager. The Committee noted the paper.

691 Treasurers report

John Short said that due to the recent adverse weather making it necessary to cancel some meetings, expenditure was lower than projected. Given this reduced expenditure, he anticipated having adequate funds to run the Committee to the end of March 2011.

692 All Party Parliamentary Group meeting

Ron Pritchard and John Short had attended the meeting on behalf of SLH. They were disappointed that having made the journey, neither the Housing Minister nor the local Members of Parliament were present. John Short said that as a result of the visit Peter Bland had written to Tim Farron, who had replied saying that he would make every effort to attend in future. The report was noted.

693 Recycling Boxes and Mobility Scooters in Sheltered Schemes

Peter Bland was not present to present his paper, however John Short reported that he had been present at an Overview and Scrutiny Committee when the matter was discussed. Tenants in Sheltered Schemes had experienced different levels of assistance with their refuse and re-cycling. Margaret Pritchard asked for a separate meeting to be arranged with the people responsible.

JSt

694 Members' Reports

Ron Pritchard- had attended the Cumbria Tenants Forum on 19 January 2011, when a presentation about Choice Based Lettings had been given. The theme of their next Awareness Day would be on Choice Based Lettings and it was hoped that applicants for housing would attend. Ron circulated copies of the presentation.

Margaret Pritchard asked for a separate training session for members of Tenants Committee to be arranged.

JSt

Robin Martakies- had attended the Resident Involvement Service Improvement Group (RISIG) on 13 January 2011. Subjects discussed were Estate Walkabouts, Tenants Annual Conference and Area Discussion Groups.

Dorothy Dixon. Had attended the Leaseholder Service Improvement Group (LhSIG). Members were disappointed to learn that the facility for Leaseholders to pay large bills by instalments was being withdrawn.

695 Any Other Business

Ron Pritchard- asked the Committee to give some thought to future Tenant Board Members so that the necessary development and support could be given. On behalf of the Committee, Ron also thanked the SLH staff who had worked over the Xmas holiday period attending to frozen and burst pipes, which in many instances could have been prevented by the tenant taking some simple precautions.

Margaret Pritchard- presented certificates of attendance to Ron Pritchard, Robin Martakies and Charles Howarth for a 'Means of Ventilation' event on 25 February 2010.

696 Date of next meeting

24 February 2011

697 Closure

The meeting closed at 13:30