

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES
THURSDAY 3rd DECEMBER 2009 AT 10.30 HRS
HELD AT
THE RESOURCE CENTRE, LITTLE AYNAM HOUSE, KENDAL

- Present: Margaret Pritchard (Chair)
Phyllis Tweedale
John Short
Peter Bland
Dorothy Dixon
Robin Martakies
Charles Howarth
Joan Chadwick
Margaret Akrigg
Ron Pritchard
- Officers in attendance: Peter Thomas, Chief Executive- South Lakes Housing (part)
Jacqui Blenkinship, Director of Asset Management- South Lakes Housing (part)
Bev Townley, Senior Housing Officer- South Lakes Housing (part)
Lucy Reynolds, Senior Strategy Officer- South Lakeland District Council (part)
Suzy Duffy, Community Participation Co-ordinator- South Lakes Housing
John Stirling, Tenant Participation Officer- South Lakes Housing
- Guests: Brenda Gray, Housing and Development Portfolio Holder- South Lakeland District Council
- Apologies: Win Sayers
Ian Elleray, Community and Housing Manager- South Lakeland District Council.
Tony Naylor, Parks and Contracts Officer- South Lakeland District Council. (see minute 571)
- Circulation: As above
- Copy to:

Action

564 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

565 Matters arising

(Minute 552) John Short asked when SLDC would be appointing the Strategic Options Review Project Manager, and the Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA). Peter Thomas said that interviews for the Project Manager post were being held on 7 December and the Chair of Tenants Committee would be part of the interview panel. Once the project manager had been appointed, the appointment of an ITA would form part of the project plan. Tenants Committee would be involved in the appointment of the ITA.

566 SLH Board Minutes 29 October

Noted

567 SLH Board Agenda 10 December 2009

Service Improvement Group report- (item 6.2). John Short noted that the review of Service Improvement Groups (SIGs) had originated at Tenants Committee.

Sheltered Housing- (item 4.1). Robin Martakies sought clarification of the term 'relaxation of the local occupancy requirements'. Brenda Gray said that bedsit accommodation was not popular and in attempt to increase demand the requirement for applicants to have a connection with Windermere or the Lakes area had been dropped.

New Regulatory Framework- (item 4.4). Ron Pritchard asked how the tenant Services Authority (TSA) would regulate Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs). Peter Thomas said that as the Council was the landlord of properties managed on a day to day basis by ALMOs, the TSA planned to introduce a national protocol to ensure that ALMOs were a key participant in the regulation process. Whilst this arrangement was cumbersome, it was a legal matter.

Robin Martakies noted that the setting of local standards was clearly tenant empowerment, not merely involvement. Suzy Duffy said that the planned review of the District Wide Tenant Participation Agreement (DWTPA) would look at this matter in greater detail.

Policy Review; Empty Property (voids) policy- (item6.4). Robin Martakies noted that decoration of voids by SLH was limited to 'prospective household members over 80 years of age, or with disabilities that prevent them being able to redecorate', and believed this threshold to be too high.

Peter Thomas then updated the Committee on negotiations to secure a management fee for 2010-11. He said that it was crucial that decisions taken now secured the long term future of Council housing in South Lakeland. Decent Homes funding had finished and the predicted shortfall in funding was now upon us. The management agreement stated that the annual fee was a matter for negotiation between Tenants, SLDC and SLH. The completion of the Decent Homes scheme will result in a decrease in funding of approximately £180k from the management fee. By constant restructuring within SLH the numbers of full time equivalent staff had been reduced by 10% since 2007. If further immediate restructuring was required SLH had no resources to make early retirement or voluntary redundancy payments. With no increase in workload, current commitments required an increase of £39k or 1.6% in the fee. Due to under performance by the current provider, a new gas servicing contractor would have to be appointed. It was now vital that the Strategic Options Review identified a viable financial future which was in the long term interests of tenants.

Ron Pritchard expressed frustration about the delays to the commencement of the Strategic Options Review which had been first discussed by Tenants Committee in October 2008 and there had been little progress in the last year.

Robin Martakies asked about the recent appointment of two Business Improvement Managers and Peter Thomas said that restructuring had resulted in a reduction of approximately £60k from the staff salary budget.

Phyllis Tweedale asked what the worst case scenario would be. Peter Thomas said that without a sufficient management fee, SLDC would be asked to indicate which

areas of service delivery they no longer wished SLH to deliver, however he hoped that by use of reserves built up in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) the service to tenants could be sustained until the outcome of the Strategic Options Review was known.

Resolved- Margaret Pritchard and John Short represent tenants in the joint discussions with SLDC and SLH.

568 Treasurers Report

John Short circulated his written report. The £400 which had been allocated for transport to the Tenants Christmas Event would be shown as a cheque transfer at the next meeting. The report was noted and John thanked for his work.

569 Strategic Housing Options Update

Lucy Reynolds said that earlier discussions had covered her update well, however she added that the project was due to finish in October 2010.

Jackie Blenkinship said that there had been 4 tenders issued, but only two returned. An evaluation template had been made for use for the Project Manager interviews on 7 December.

570 Sheltered Housing

Jacqui Blenkinship introduced her paper saying that it was a strategy to ensure sound investment decisions for the future. The exercise gathered data already held by SLH, and the 470 sheltered properties provided a pilot on which to build strategies for the remaining properties.

Of the sheltered properties, only one block of bedsits warranted no further investment in cyclical and planned works. The figures also showed that there was over provision of sheltered housing by a number of providers in various towns within the District. Flats were particularly difficult to let as they often did not address the long term mobility needs of prospective tenants. Any de-sheltering would only take place when a property became vacant. The figures would be reviewed each year to ensure that sound decisions continued to be made.

Phyllis Tweedale said did not accept any of the report and that sheltered properties should be openly advertised. Ron Pritchard said that Choice Based Lettings would alter this.

Dorothy Dixon said that an inappropriate mix of tenants can cause problems on estates.

Brenda Gray said that it was important to recognise that SLDC was not the only provider in the District, and there were other Registered Social Landlords offering a similar service.

Robin Martakies supported the report and urged the Board to proceed, albeit with caution. He wondered if there would be the possibility of using short term tenancies to counter the concerns expressed by Dorothy Dixon.

John Short supported the paper too, but was concerned that the costs of the sheltered housing service would have to be met by a decreasing number of tenants.

Jacqui Blenkinship said it was important to realise that her report was purely property based and did not take into account issues such as service charges and staffing. Subject to Board approval of the proposals, there would be a period of one year to

discuss these particular issues further. In addition it was always possible to re-shelter a previously de-sheltered property.

571 Investment Framework

Jacqui Blenkinship explained that the grant to fund Decent Homes work would cease in the next financial year and a projected income of £1.8million in the form of the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) could be reasonably expected as an alternative. The amount would not allow for the delivery of all the investment work necessary in the housing stock, and therefore a framework had to be agreed as to how the limited funds would be allocated. Investment had to be prioritised to reflect firstly general legislation, secondly landlord/housing/tenant legislation and thirdly tenants wishes. A planned maintenance programme would be produced in accordance with the framework, the detail of which would be brought back to Tenants Committee for agreement.

Resolved- the Committee endorse the investment framework.

572 Grounds maintenance Contract

Tony Naylor, Parks and Contracts Officer for South Lakeland District Council had attended Committee at the agreed time, but due to the comprehensive update on the management fee negotiations, and fully answering questions raised by members, the agreed time for the item of business was well past. With the permission of the Chair, Suzy Duffy presented the item.

Suzy said that a new grounds maintenance contract had been drawn up jointly between SLDC and Barrow Borough Council, to commence in April 2010. Some members of Tenants Committee had already been involved in previous discussions with Tony Naylor. Tenders had to be returned by 15 January 2010, and two members of the Committee were now invited to join the evaluation team to select the successful applicant. The two members should reflect the varying experiences of both sheltered and estate tenants.

Resolved- Ron Pritchard and Phyllis Tweedale represent tenants in the evaluation process.

573 Tenants Xmas Event

Bev Townley updated the Committee with details of the Xmas event for tenants being held in Kendal Town Hall on 10 December. A 27 piece Retirement Band would be playing carols and pupils from Castle Park primary school would sing. Bev thanked Tenants Committee for providing funds for transport to be provided, allowing tenants from across the District to attend at no individual cost to them.

574 Family Fun Days

Suzy Duffy said that her report captured the achievements of the 3 Family Fun Days (FFDs) held in the summer. The events had achieved the objective of increasing our engagement with the tenants with young families, a group we did not readily hear from regularly. Ten new members of the Tenant Involvement Club (TIC) had been enrolled and 20 pet policy consultation forms had been completed. Suzy asked the Committee to endorse the report and the proposal that 3 estate based events be organised in 2010 primarily aimed at young people.

John Short drew attention to minute 544 (17 September) and again asked who within SLH had changed from Area Discussion Groups (ADGs) to FFDs.

Robin Martakies said he supported FFDs but they should be in addition to ADGs. In

moving away from ADGs to FFDs without consulting Tenants Committee was not tenant empowerment and the Committee was not being listened to.

Resolved- that a recommendation be made to the Board from Tenants Committee, accepting the report as tabled, but with the reinstatement of ADGs.

575 Review of District Wide Tenant Participation Timetable

Suzy Duffy presented a proposed timetable for the annual review of the District Wide Tenant Participation Agreement, with the proviso that it was compatible with any emerging issues from the Strategic Options Review. The Committee accepted the draft timetable with an agreement to proceed gently.

576 Decent Homes Performance Monitoring

The final monitoring report was noted. Margaret Pritchard thanked the many tenants who had been involved over the last 3 years in monitoring performance. Tenant influence had been instrumental in raising satisfaction rates to 100% after a very shaky start.

John Short had one last scheduled meeting to attend with staff from Norfolk Property Services (NPS) and he would report the result in January 2010.

Joan Chadwick said that she had attended the last meeting of the Community Investment Group, and had sent a thank you card on behalf of the Committee to Bramall Construction.

Resolved- a formal letter of thanks be sent from the Chairman to Bramall Construction.

577 Members Reports

Ron Pritchard- The Cumbria and North Lancashire Tenants and Residents Forum had provided an awareness day on 25 November, 'In for a Penny'. The event centred on the themes of financial exclusion and household money saving measures. As Chairman of the Forum, he was also pleased to be associated with the successful appointment of a member to the council of the National Tenant Voice (NTV)

Joan Chadwick- The Decent Homes CORE Group and Community Investment Group projected that all environmental improvements on estates would be completed by Xmas.

Dorothy Dixon- The Leaseholder Service Improvement Group had been forced to defer many items of business at their last meeting due to flooding across the District.

578 Any other Business

(a) John Stirling informed members that the Audit Commission was currently recruiting tenants to assist with their inspections of public housing providers. There were many members of the Committee with the relevant skills, abilities and knowledge to challenge and give constructive feedback and urged members to consider making an application.

(b) John Stirling would arrange transport etc should there be sufficient members of the Committee wishing to attend the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) board meeting in Manchester on 17 March 2010.

579 Date of Next Meeting

14 January 2010