

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES

10:30am Thursday 21 April 2016 held in the
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal

Present: Charles Howarth (Chair)
John Short
Dorothy Dixon
Robin Martakies
Margaret Akrigg
Trevor Newby
Stephen Bolton
Lorraine Birchall
Kenny Mayo
Paul Athersmith
June Peckston

Guests Wendy Orr- tenant from Ulverston
Mavis Nelson- tenant from Ulverston

Officers in attendance: John Mansergh- Assistant Director of Business Improvement
John Stirling- Tenant Involvement Officer
Richard Hayes- Director of Assets and Investment (part)
Vicky Battista- Housing Officer (part)

Apologies: Sue Layfield
Jim Layfield
Win Sayers
Jackie Cooper
Katy Newby

Circulation: As above

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Welcome

Charles welcomed Wendy Orr and Mavis Nelson to the meeting and hoped they would gain an interest in the work of the Committee.

John Stirling circulated a thank you card from Joan Chadwick following receipt of her retirement gratuity from the Committee.

1153 Minutes of previous meeting (11 February 2016)

Agreed as a true record.

1154 Matters arising

John Short said that the lack of Board papers made it difficult for the Committee to participate fully in SLH. Charles Howarth said in future the Committee would have much earlier input into decisions which would shape the future of SLH, in line with the independent review of governance recommendations.

1155 Treasurers Report

John Short presented his most recent report which was noted. This would be the final report from him as Treasurer and members would move to an electronic method of payment directly from SLH in the future. The Committee would return approx. £2k to SLH once the account was formally closed. John was thanked for his stewardship of the funds entrusted to the Committee over many years.

1156 SLH Board minutes- 18 February 2016

Minute 5011- Robin Martakies asked for clarification about 'changes to S 106 definitives'. John Mansergh said that it referred to government now including Starter Homes within the definition, not just homes for Social or Affordable Rent. Some changes to the ratio of Starter Homes/Social/Affordable Rent were proposed, but the Lords had secured flexibility for local areas to determine affordable housing requirements eg rural exceptions.

Minute 5011- John Short noted details of the Sheltered Service Review and referred to the matter being on the Board Agenda for approval. He asked what would be approved, as the consultation with individual Schemes was not yet complete. It would be out of order for the Board to approve any changes until the detail was known. The changes were being pushed through too quickly without time for proper discussion.

Robin Martakies said that although Tenants' Committee were given an overview of the issues at their last meeting, they were being marginalised and should be given the opportunity to see the papers before the Board made a decision. Charles Howarth said that feedback was essential before a decision was made.

Margaret Akrigg said that the removal of Communal Lounges would be detrimental to vulnerable residents who valued community events. She felt that SLH had not engaged in consultation, merely stated their preferred option.

John Mansergh referred to the presentation at the previous meeting and said that changes had to be made as there is a threat that government was no longer willing to use Housing Benefit (HB) to pay for some services and facilities. Additionally, demand is a big factor meaning SLH is losing a lot of income.

John Short referred to the de-sheltering of some properties, which would make very attractive for Right to Buy (RTB), reducing the stock of SLH. He also said that the Offer Document made a commitment to retain Scheme Managers. John Mansergh advised that the promises expire in March 2017 in response to a question from John Short

Charles Howarth said that he would relay the concerns of the Committee to the Board, but said some changes were outside the control of SLH.

1157 SLH Board agenda- 28 April 2016

John Mansergh gave a verbal update on Board agenda items, in particular the retirement of two long serving members of staff, the impact and lessons learned from the flooding and complaints monitoring. A separate session would be arranged with members to formally appoint a Complaints Panel.

Dorothy Dixon asked about the cost of insurance in the light of flooding, as the charges due to be paid by leaseholders had risen alarmingly and questioned if

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tenants would see a corresponding cut their in services as a result. John Mansergh said that whilst it was unfortunate for leaseholders that their costs had increased it was not possible to increase rents by a corresponding amount, as SLH was complying with the government 1% rent reduction policy (for general needs tenants). There would be no direct reduction in services offered to tenants, but the increased premium now having to be paid by SLH did mean that this money would not available to be used elsewhere in SLH.

1158 Governance Review- A Stronger Voice for Tenants

John Mansergh said that following an external review it was recommended SLH needed to move to a model of governance more generally used by Housing Associations. In future the Committee may choose to scrutinise 2 or 3 service areas each year and have earlier involvement in policy scrutiny, performance reviews and rent setting, as opposed to reviewing Board papers. A consultant (Yvonne Davies) had been appointed to lead the review and would meet the Committee at their August meeting.

John Stirling said added that Tenants' Committee would be more involved under this model than merely reviewing decision papers prior to the Board meeting.

Robin Martakies said it was regrettable that an appointment had been made without reference to the Committee first. John Short agreed with Robin.

Loraine Birchall said that communication by SLH with Tenants' Committee was lacking in detail and needed a change in officer culture alongside the governance recommendations.

1159 Future of Maintenance

Richard Hayes spoke about the current situation within SLH Maintenance, where the results of the investment programme were starting to demonstrate the falling demand for day to day repairs. There was now the capacity within SLH to take on additional work which was currently contracted out. Another possibility was providing a repairs service to other Registered Providers (RPs) within the area. This might be particularly attractive to another provider as SLH would be able to provide the service without having to charge VAT. The information technology (IT) and management systems used by the repairs service was performing well, and work diaries for the various trades operatives was booked up 2 weeks ahead, but a service which captured all efficiencies needed to have work diaries booked 3 weeks ahead.

Discussions with other Housing Associations (HAs) was underway, but these were real growth opportunities for growth. A downside may be a slightly longer wait for repairs to be completed to SLH properties.

Robin Martakies said that SLH promised an exceptional repairs service and had largely delivered on this. Robin supported plans to bring additional income to SLH.

Charles Howarth said that it was often better for tenants to have a repair appointment at their convenience, as opposed to being driven by an industry benchmark. Charles thanked Richard for an early sharing of ideas.

1160 SLH role in domestic violence matters

Vicky Battista gave the Committee an overview of her work as the lead Housing Officer (HO) within SLH on domestic violence (DV) matters. She spoke about the need to work quickly on occasions to arrange safe accommodation and provide increased security measures to certain properties. SLH would take a firm line with tenants who were the perpetrators of domestic abuse, including injunctions and eviction.

The Committee asked a range of questions and emphasised the need to continue to work in partnership to raise awareness and respond quickly to incidents of domestic violence.

1161 Offer Document monitoring

Defer to next meeting as time had elapsed.

1162 Members reports

None

1163 Any other business

None

1164 Date of next meeting

9 June 2016

1165 Closure

The meeting closed at 13:00hrs.