

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES

10:30am Thursday 9 June 2016 held in the
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal

Present: Charles Howarth (Chair)
John Short
Dorothy Dixon
Margaret Akrigg
Trevor Newby
Stephen Bolton
Lorraine Birchall
Paul Athersmith
June Peckston
Sue Layfield
Jim Layfield
Katy Newby

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

Officers in attendance: John Mansergh- Assistant Director of Business Improvement
Lynne Huxley (part) – Principal Housing Officer
Cath Purdy (part) – Chief Executive
Rebecca Boardley (part) – CBL Co-ordinator
Stephen Roe (part) – Customer Services Manager

Apologies: Robin Martakies
Win Sayers
Jackie Cooper

Circulation: As above

ACTION

Welcome

The Committee agreed to send Robin a 'get well soon' card following his accident at home.

1166 Minutes of previous meeting (21 April 2016)

Agreed as a true record.

1167 Matters arising

Cath Purdy provided an update on sheltered housing advising that the Board had convened a special meeting to consider the outcomes of consultation. She added that the Board was clear that we have an issue of viability to address both in terms of customer demand and affordability which will worsen with the intended potential benefit changes. The position will get worse and the Board agreed to 'hold off' with some of the proposed changes for now but this would be reconsidered on a scheme by scheme basis. For the time being, the Board agreed to make changes to the service to improve efficiency (e.g. putting the scheme managers into hubs), to grow the service into the community and to consider the viability of each scheme.

Dorothy Dixon asked whether current tenants could apply for 'de-sheltering' and Cath replied that this was not possible as each tenancy was on the basis of receiving the supported housing service.

Wendy Orr asked whether SLH could make a contribution towards funding the schemes as the changes were contradictory to other messages about helping older people and social isolation. Cath advised that it was an issue of funding and the Board needed to ensure the business has a viable financial plan. Funding for supported housing ought to be funded nationally but the indications are that low level support services e.g. sheltered housing may not be funded in the future. Loraine Birchall added that the Board had considered the issue in great detail and were concerned about the projections of financial losses which equated to being able to build around 45 new homes. She said that the Board had to consider all groups and to find the right balance.

John Short stated that although the potential new benefit cap would be introduced to new tenants only this was going to become a bigger problem over time as residents move on. He added that the report gives tenants the best possible deal now whilst looking at the future. He added that it was clear that tenants had been listened to. Jim Layfield stated that the leaflet sent out to sheltered tenants was excellently presented.

1168 Business Strategy, Governance Review and Tenant Engagement Plan

Cath Purdy advised that there had been a raft of issues, including the rent cut and the new Housing & Planning Act, which had forced the Board to reconsider its priorities. A draft business strategy was going to the meeting next week. The draft plan does not include the offer document promises as these are now almost complete and Tenants' Committee would be involved more in reviewing services along the way. The draft plan included focussed priorities around providing good and cost effective services, increasing our portfolio i.e. building more homes to address the housing crisis locally, improving the running of our business and selling our services or doing more in partnership with others. The focus of the regulator was now on costs and this would be a key feature of the Board and Committee's consideration in the months ahead.

Dorothy Dixon asked whether SLH has contracted out its emergency repairs service to Liverpool. Cath advised that the service is provided through contract with Riverside Housing Association and had been provided for a long time, although it is now answered in Liverpool rather than Carlisle. It was a good example of being able to provide more cost effective services than by providing it ourselves and we would be looking to do more of this.

Cath then outlined about the Governance Review which had been commissioned externally. The recommendations include moving to a skills based board rather than recruiting to constituency parts e.g. one third councillors, one third tenants and one third independents. In future the Board would move towards recruiting purely on skills which would of course result in a mix of tenants and councillors but places would not be reserved or nominated in the same way. She added that this is typical of stock transfers over time but this had been a feature of the new Housing & Planning Act in a move to reduce local authority control of Housing Associations as part of the attempts to influence the ONS to remove Associations from the public sector accounts. John Short supported the proposals and stated that the future of the business is dependent on a quality Board and he anticipated that SLDC would support the move following his own conversations in the past with previous council directors. Jim Layfield asked how the Board would assess skills and Cath advised that this would be part of a regular appraisal process including assessing skills gaps.

Cath advised that the recommendations has also led to an independent review of tenant engagement and the Committee would be more involved in policy decisions

and scrutiny far earlier in the decision making process. She circulated the draft annual engagement plan. The Committee noted that there was a significant amount to consider over the next year

1169 Choice Based Lettings Review

Lynne Huxley and Rebecca Boardley introduced the consultation on proposed changes to the CBL scheme. The deadline for consultation was 13th June and the CBL partnership wanted the feedback from tenants.

Charles Howarth said that from his experience the CBL appeals process was fair. Steven Bolton said he was pleased to see the commitments to ex Armed Forces personnel. Loraine Birchall asked for clarification on how SLH could help to move tenants who were living in upstairs flats with mobility issues. Dorothy Dixon asked about whether waiting time was still being considered. Lynne advised that SLH could assist with tenants wanting to move home but emphasised the need to apply. She added that time was still a factor as if there are two households in the same category then the person that is offered the home first is the one that has been on the register the longest.

Rebecca thanked the Committee for their views and also commented that she would take away comments about the need to raise the awareness of applying for accommodation through the Cumbria Choice service.

1170 Offer Document Promises Monitoring Report

John Mansergh recommended 13 offer document promises to be 'signed off' by the Committee as completed promises. The Committee agreed to the majority with the exception of promise number 34 (tenant involvement in contractor selection) where John agreed to provide more evidence.

JM

Jim Layfield commented about a lack of painting at Thornfield Close and Wendy Orr commented about grass cutting at Fell Close. John agreed to find more information outside of the meeting.

JM

1171 Website and Digital Services

Stephen Roe introduced the development of the SLH website which had been re-designed following obtaining the views of over 900 tenants. The Committee liked the simplicity, removal of documents and jargon, focus on self-service and that everything is 'one click away'.

Charles Howarth was concerned about the use of colours/contrast and problems for visually impaired people and those with dementia. Stephen advised that the site looks better on a personal laptop/other device rather than the big screen in the Windermere suite but agreed to look at the home page again. Loraine Birchall asked that SLH use the web accessibility tool to check compliance with industry standards around colours etc. John Short asked about whether applying for a garage should be on the home page but he accepted the reason when Stephen advised that SLH generates £0.5M in garage rent collection. Sue Layfield asked about the support for people who struggle with websites and Stephen added that SLH would launch its own 'live chat' service shortly after the implementation of the new housing system within the next few months.

1172 Complaints Report

The Committee noted the complaints trends and learning points.

1173 Performance Report

The Committee noted the positive performance results despite the challenges of this year's floods.

1174 Star Survey

John Mansergh asked for tenant input into the general landlord satisfaction survey which is currently being commissioned. Loraine Birchall asked that a question be inserted about whether residents would support the introduction of 'no cold calling' zones.

JM

1175 Annual Report and Tenant Conference

John Mansergh asked the Committee to reflect on the requirement to reduce costs but also to consider how best to engage residents. In view of the costs of both of these items incurred in 2015/16, the Committee agreed not to hold a conference this year (saving £4k). The Committee agreed to set up a small working group to help produce the annual report and would consider options to reduce the cost this year (the report cost around £20k last year). The annual report is a regulatory requirement and was usually well received by SLH tenants. Charles Howarth added that many landlords choose not to involve tenants in their annual reports but SLH and Tenants' Committee agreed to produce a joint report.

JM

The working group will be; Charles Howarth, John Short, Wendy Orr and Paul Athersmith.

1176 SLH Board minutes- 28 April 2016

There were no comments.

1177 SLH Board agenda- 16 June 2016

Charles Howarth advised that the Board had a special meeting about the proposed sheltered housing changes and the Tenants' Committee views had been considered in the current thinking.

1178 Members reports

Loraine Birchall mentioned the charity children's book that had been written for young children called 'Katie and the Floods' following the December floods. She was pleased that the books had been purchased by SLH to send to tenants with young children who had been flooded.

1179 Any other business

Jim Layfield mentioned that in response to Baroness Warwick's visit that he had accessed the National Housing Federation website and found it extremely useful for tenants e.g. information about the proposed extension of Right to Buy etc.

1180 Date of next meeting

25 August 2016

Closure

The meeting closed at 13:30hrs.