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| SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS’ COMMITTEE MINUTES10:30am Thursday 1 September 2016 held in the Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal |

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| Present: | Charles Howarth (Chair)John ShortDorothy DixonMargaret AkriggTrevor NewbyStephen BoltonLoraine BirchallPaul AthersmithJune PeckstonSue LayfieldJim LayfieldRobin MartakiesWin SayersWendy OrrMavis NelsonStephen Bolton  |  |
| Guests | None |
| Officers in attendance: | John Mansergh- Assistant Director of Business ImprovementAlison Kinnon (part)- Director of Customers & Communities (designate)John Stirling- Tenant Involvement Officer  |
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| Apologies: | Kenny MayoJohn Stirling reported that Jackie Cooper had written to SLH tendering her resignation.  |
| Circulation: | As above |
|  |  | **ACTION** |
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| **1188** | **Minutes of previous meeting (9 June 2016)** |  |
|  | Minute 1178- Loraine Birchall said that the charity books had been donated, not purchased. The minutes were then agreed as a true record. |  |
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| **1189****1190****1191****1192****1193****1194****1195****1196****1197****1198****1199** | **Matters arising**Minute 1171- John Short said that the new website was difficult to navigate, did not contain sufficient details of the sheltered schemes or the Tenant Handbook. There were no photographs of either tenants or properties and the overall feel was ‘impersonal’. It was also difficult to read with the user being denied to option to alter the size of text displayed. Minutes of Tenants Committee and the Board were no longer available. Charles Howarth demonstrated that the mobile phone version was easy to use.John Mansergh said that there were several reasons the website had to change. Research showed that on average, visits to the website lasted approximately 30 seconds and the most popular pages visited were about paying rent and reporting repairs. The new website reflected these trends, becoming more interactive, as opposed to a library of documents. June Peckston said that she thought the new website was user friendly. John acknowledged the feedback to date and stressed that website development would continue. Tenants’ Committee minutes were now available but the Board would have to take a position on their minutes being available. Access issues for users with visual impairment would be looked at again however the provider had assured SLH that the new site complied with current requirements and guidelines. Inclusion of the Tenant Handbook would also be looked at again during the ongoing review and evaluation process. **Presentation on emerging housing issues and policies**Alison Kinnon appraised the Committee on emerging issues which will at some time need a strategic decision from the Board, together with supporting policies and procedures. Following each subject, members raised various questions and observations summarised as-Voluntary Right to Buy (VRTB)Charles Howarth asked if grants from the HCA (Homes and Communities Agency) would still be available. Alison believed that grants would still be available as homes bought through VRTB were not new homes. Loraine Birchall asked about the number of new tenants since transfer. Alison said that latest figures showed approximately 17% of tenants had joined SLH since transfer. Sue Layfield asked if SLH could force a tenant to exercise their VRTB. Alison said no, however she used the example that the Board could in the future agree a policy to sell a high value property when it became void, and use the receipt to build 2 new units. John Short cautioned against SLH spending a disproportionate amount of time on this matter and the day to day business of SLH must continue. Paul Athersmith asked if there would be any provision for buy back, should a VRTB owner default on their mortgage. Alison said there was no specific provision for such circumstances.Fixed term tenanciesSue Layfield asked if new tenants would be given a general restricted length of tenancy. Alison said that each case would be dependent on individual circumstances, however the time that children in the household reached a certain age or point in their lives would be a starting point in calculating the length of the term. Pay to stayLoraine Birchall highlighted confidentiality and data protection matters with HMRC. Jim Layfield mentioned the problems that tenants who were self-employed or on a variable hours contract may have. Stephen Bolton said that the introduction of real time reporting of wages by employers to HMRC could smooth out any wild variations. Dorothy Dixon asked if the income of tenants would become a factor when allocating properties to tenants. Alison Kinnon said that it would depend on the banding of the applicant, but acknowledged that currently it was only at the point of allocation that SLH sought evident of income.Fixed term tenanciesMargaret Akrigg asked if the arrangements would be linked to the £31k ‘pay to stay’ limit. Alison said that it would be part of a wider strategy. Jim Layfield asked if any new system would be more expensive for SLH to administer. Alison said it was highly likely, however the additional cost had to be balanced against advantages, such as making best use of homes. Charles Howarth raised the possibility of tenants becoming homeless at the end of their fixed term. Alison said that review meetings would have to be planned with the tenant in the final year prior to the end of the fixed term to avoid such circumstances, and it may be that if their circumstances had not changed that they would be offered another fixed term tenancy.Changing from 48 to 52 rent collection weeksJune Peckston asked how any change would be communicated to vulnerable tenants. Alison said that a communication strategy would be part of any changes. John Short asked what fraction of tenants now paid monthly. Alison said that the majority of tenants paid monthly. Win Sayers asked what the main benefit to SLH was. Alison said that as more people moved from Housing Benefit (HB) to Universal Credit (UC) where the presumption was that benefit would be paid to the tenant not the landlord, help with arrears prevention could be offered earlier and rent collection better managed. Robin Martakies left the meeting **Draft Value for Money self-assessment**John Mansergh said the production of the report was a regulatory requirement, but it did require tenant input. Analysis of our costs showed that SLH has higher costs than our comparators, and some of that could be explained by the investment programme since transfer. Stephen Bolton noted blank sections in the report, John said that the report was draft and waiting tables to be inserted, however the narrative as currently printed covered the issues. The focus of the regulator was now on costs as government was leaning towards home ownership. Charles Howarth noted the high cost of SLH repairs compared to others. Loraine Birchall gave details of an extensive repair to a property in her locality recently which had been caused by the tenant refusing work to bring the property up to the Decent Homes standard. She said that SLH had to become more robust in their approach to tenants who declined upgrades due to personal inconvenience. John Mansergh reminded the Committee that SLH wanted to move towards a Cost Sharing Vehicle (CSV) with other Housing Associations to make better use of SLH resources which should result in lower costs. Stephen Bolton highlighted a local issue when SLH had painted rotten shed doors shortly before replacing them. John Mansergh said that Robin Martakies has asked him to raise the fact that value for money was not just about money, but included fully engaging with tenants too. In particular he noted the change (page 3) that SLH would in future provide a ‘good’ service, not the ‘quality’ service it was currently providing. Dorothy Dixon said that SLH had raised the expectation of tenants and the change needed to be managed.John Short highlighted an example he had seen of SLH providing a ‘quality’ kitchen design service to the personal preferences of a tenant, only to have the installation remodelled on a change of tenancy a short time later. John acknowledged the ability of tenants to choose kitchen ranges, but emphasised the need for SLH to be firmer with layouts to avoid remodelling to suit personal preferences at a later date. Paul Athersmith said that SLH provided a good service, but in doing so had raised the expectations of tenants. John Mansergh stated that tenants would be engaged in a wide review of service standards in each area as part of the Value for Money Action Plan.**Draft complaints policy and leaflet**John Mansergh said that the policy built on work already undertaken by the Committee, and the appointment of 5 members to the SLH Complaints Panel at the AGM on 25 August. The first meeting of the Panel would discuss the policy, but any member should contact John if they had any observations to make before the panel met. John Stirling to arrange Complaint Panel quarterly meetings. **Update on progress on the 2016 Annual Report**John Mansergh said that the Working Group had met on 3 occasions and produced a working draft. It was now a joint report between Tenants’ Committee and SLH. It was due to be delivered to tenants commencing the week of 26 September.Stephen Bolton left the meeting.**Update on Tenant Survey**John Mansergh said that MEL Research had been commissioned to undertake the current survey, using a mix of paper and email methods. The request from the Committee to include a question about cold calling had been agreed. The survey would no doubt be a topic for discussion with tenants not on the Committee, and Committee members could provide the necessary reassurance. It was agreed to offer the usual prize draw of 6 x £50 shopping vouchers to encourage participation.**Board minutes (16 June) and draft agenda (8 September)**Minute 5045- Dorothy Dixon noted the streamlining of the Board and Committees, and asked if the frequency of Tenants’ Committee would change. John Mansergh said that Committee meetings would be based upon the agreed annual engagement plan rather than organised around the Board meetings as previously set. The draft agenda was noted.**Member reports**None**Date of next meeting**13 October 2016**Any other business**None**Closure**The meeting closed at 13:45 hrs  | JSt |
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