

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES

10:30am Thursday 13 October 2016 held in the
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal

Present: Charles Howarth (Chair)
John Short
Margaret Akrigg
Trevor Newby
Stephen Bolton
Lorraine Birchall
Paul Athersmith
Wendy Orr
Mavis Nelson
Robin Martakies

Guests None

Officers in attendance: John Mansergh- Assistant Director of Business Improvement
Lyn Richardson- Community Engagement Officer
John Stirling- Tenant Involvement Officer
Gordon Sisson (part)- Sheltered Housing Manager
Alison Kinnon (part)- Director of Customers and Communities

Apologies: Win Sayers
Dorothy Dixon
Jim Layfield
Sue Layfield
Kenny Mayo

Circulation: As above

ACTION

1200 Minutes of previous meeting (1 September 2016)

Agreed as a true record.

1201 Matters arising

None.

1202 Sheltered Service Review

Gordon Sisson said that since the last presentation to the Committee, government had changed their policy and as from April 2019, all tenants would come under the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) cap, not just general needs tenants as had been previously announced. A system of discretionary payments would be available, but at this time it was not known how this would be administered. Also, as of April 2017 sheltered rents, but not service charges, would be subject to the 1% reduction already being applied to general needs rents. To continue to make the SLH Sheltered Service viable, plans were going ahead to create two hubs, at Edgecombe Court (Kendal) and Ellerside (Ulverston) from where SLH staff would operate.

At Edgecombe Court, planning consent had been obtained, a contractor appointed and it was anticipated that construction would take around 6-8 weeks. At Ellerside, final detail was still to be confirmed, but when done, the project would go out to tender. Both hubs were on target to be completed by the end of December 2016. Members of the Committee were invited to visit the hubs once they were fully operational. Once SLH staff were operating from the hubs, an Independent Living Offer would be made to tenants and the wider community, and work on the various business models was ongoing. SLH was meeting regularly with elected District Councillors and local MPs to keep them abreast of changes and proposals.

Wendy Orr said that she had learned that there may be further parliamentary debate about the various issues. Alison Kinnon said that SLH had to work on the information known at present but accepted that matters may change.

Margaret Akrigg asked when the menu of tailored services would be offered to tenants, Gordon said it would be done once the Independent Living Offer had been costed and finalised.

John Short said he was concerned that Schemes were losing Scheme Managers and over time Scheme Managers would disappear. Gordon said that Schemes would no longer have a dedicated Manager, but the Scheme Manager service would continue until the end of the Offer Document period. All functions would continue to be undertaken until that time. John said that residents were concerned that they would not know which member of SLH staff would be calling on them each day and asked that communication with residents was in person and not by letter. Gordon said that all residents or their families or representatives had received a personal visit from a Scheme Manager to explain the changes. Any resident/family or legal representative could request a further visit and this would be accommodated.

Alison Kinnon said that the changes were in response to government policies, and were not being driven by SLH to save costs. There was a shortfall between the LHA payable and the rent and service charges due to SLH. The changes were designed to keep Schemes open, not close them down. The Board had confirmed that once a scheme became unviable it would close.

Margaret Akrigg asked about the future of communal lounges, Gordon said that they would be retained and available to residents whilst schemes were viable.

John Short asked what would happen to the offices within schemes, Gordon said that he was considering making two of them into hot desk areas in the interests of staff efficiency and he would be guided by SLH Assets about the future of any other unused space.

1203 Tenancy agreement revision for new tenancies

Alison Kinnon said SLH proposed to introduce a new tenancy agreement for all new tenancies in the future. The new agreement would be linked with fixed term tenancies which the Committee were already aware of. At the time of transfer, SLDC would not allow their tenancy to be altered significantly but it now needed to be updated to reflect current issues. Amongst other things, the new tenancy would strengthen the current agreement in the areas of, rent obligations, data protection, vexatious complaints, access for gas servicing, tenant improvements, succession, mobility scooters and planting trees in gardens. Once a new agreement had been drafted it would be brought back to the Committee for a further opportunity to comment.

Robin Martakies asked why changes were needed to address mobility scooters and succession. Alison said that an increasing number of tenants had mobility scooters and some had more than one. In some circumstances their storage and battery charging arrangements had become a safety concern for other residents, staff and visitors. Regarding succession, a list of those entitled to succeed a tenancy was contained in the current agreement (para 5.3.5), it is proposed that this would be amended to reduce the number of people eligible. This would protect the housing stock and make best use of our limited supply. Charles Howarth asked if a family member who was a live-in adult carer would be considered eligible, Alison said this was the type of detail that had still to be worked up.

1204 Draft Tenant Involvement Strategy

John Mansergh said the policy was part of the Board governance arrangements and needed input from the Committee. It had not yet been seen by the Board or the Executive Management Team (EMT), and this was the Committee becoming involved in policy development at a much earlier stage than previously. The draft strategy built on previous sessions with Yvonne Davies on 25 August and 29 September. SLH did not see 'scrutiny' and 'Tenants Committee/Panel' as separate issues. The important factors were that tenants were able to influence decisions and there were sufficient resources dedicated to Tenant Involvement.

Robin Martakies referred to section 2C on page 7 (consulting on significant changes including management & ownership) and sought the inclusion of the provision of independent advice to tenants as part of the process. At page 11 (meetings), Robin asked that the wording reflected the changes agreed at the AGM on 25 August when the words 'consider funding requirements for the coming year' were added to the constitution. Robin also questioned the prohibition of SLDC Councillors who were also SLH tenants from joining Tenants Committee.

John Short said that there should always be at least one tenant on the Board of SLH to ensure that the views of tenants were considered prior to a decision being taken. John Mansergh said that this ultimately was a matter for the Board however there was some support for that view. Loraine Birchall said that the Committee had a shared responsibility to promote and prepare tenants for Board membership. John Short went on to say that meeting 'minutes' had been replaced by meeting 'notes', which was a weakening of the current arrangements. John Mansergh said that the recent governance review was critical of the current style of recording Board discussions and decisions and would be moving towards more 'note' based records but would include relevant points to an agreement/decision. These changes had been reflected in the Tenant Involvement Strategy. John Short also said that the terms of reference (ToR) for the Grant Application Panel (GAP) were incorrect. John Mansergh and John Short to agree the ToR outside the meeting.

JM/JSh

The Committee debated the proposed change of 'committee' to 'panel'. John Stirling said that during his conversations with tenants who were considering joining the Committee, some were put off by the word 'committee' as it suggested a very formal council type method gathering views. There were mixed views on the actual name by members, and they agreed to review the matter at a later date. The Committee thanked John Mansergh for the very good report.

1205 Benchmarking

John Mansergh explained that SLH continually compared itself with around 90 other Housing Associations of similar size etc., and presented the latest annual figures. The headline results showed that our average cost for repairs and major works was high, some of which could be accounted for due to our presence in two National Parks and conservation areas. The other area of concern was rent arrears and plans

were in hand to re-structure the Housing Management teams to tackle the issue. He added that SLH was spending less than average on Resident Involvement.

1206 Board agenda 20 October and minutes 8 September

John Mansergh said that there was an opportunity for SLH to reach a better deal with lenders and Lindsay Simons (SLH Director of Corporate Services) would attend the next meeting to advise further. Richard Hayes (Director of Assets & Investment) would also attend the next meeting to update the Committee on the proposed Cost Sharing Vehicle (CSV) where SLH could provide a repairs service to other housing providers.

JM

The Board also had an opportunity to partner SLDC in their aim to increase the supply of affordable housing.

1207 SLH Annual Report initial feedback

John Stirling provided details of initial feedback to the report as received up to 12 October. The final figures would be reported in due course. The Committee agreed that a Kendal member draw the prize winners after the closing date but before the next scheduled meeting on 1 December so that the winners could be contacted and arrangements made for them to receive their shopping vouchers before Christmas.

1208 Members' reports

Margaret Akrigg reported on a meeting of the Cumbria & North Lancashire Tenants Forum held on 28 September. The main focus was that many of the providers were going through similar changes in tenant involvement and SLH was well prepared for future changes.

1209 Any other business

Robin Martakies asked for an update on the garage site review be given at a future meeting. John Mansergh said that Richard Hayes would cover that matter on 1 December.

RH

Charles Howarth said that it was the last meeting of the Committee for John Stirling. He thanked John for his service over the previous 10 years. John thanked members for their kind words, the time that members had given to assist him in his role and their commitment to improving the lives of tenants.

1210 Date of next meeting

1 December 2016

1211 Closure

The meeting closed at 13:00hrs