

## **SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES**

10:30am Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016 held in the  
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal

Present: Charles Howarth (Chair)  
John Short  
Margaret Akrigg  
Stephen Bolton  
Lorraine Birchall  
Paul Athersmith  
Wendy Orr  
Mavis Nelson  
Robin Martakies  
Win Sayers  
Dorothy Dixon  
Jim Layfield  
Sue Layfield

Guests None

Officers in attendance: John Mansergh- Assistant Director of Business Improvement  
Cath Purdy-Chief Executive  
Lindsay Simons- Director of Corporate Services  
Richard Hayes- Director of Assets and Investment  
Lisa Maguire-Customer Experience Manager  
Lyn Richardson- Community Engagement Officer- Minutes

Apologies: Trevor Newby

Circulation: As above

### **ACTION**

#### **1. Minutes of previous meeting (13<sup>th</sup> October 2016)**

1.1 Agreed as a true record.

#### **2. Matters arising**

2.1 A proposed name change for the Tenants' Committee was proposed at the last meeting but not resolved. Charles proposed that after reviewing the options he felt that the name should change to a 'forum'. He invited views and then a vote on the options of 'Committee, Forum or Panel'. John Short, Robin Martakies, James Layfield and Dorothy Dixon did not like the idea of a forum as it sounding like a talking shop. Following a show of hands, 9 voted to remain with the 'committee' which was passed by the Chairman.

2.2 Point 1202 - John Short was concerned about the 4 category 2 schemes where there will no longer be a scheme manager and wanted to know how often a staff member will visit, once a day or by appointment only. After some discussion Cath Purdy explained that there could not be an answer today but to move forward it would be good for Alison Kinnon to contact John Short. Further discussion around sheltered housing issues identified as not relevant at this point in the meeting and a separate meeting would be more appropriate. This would include Margaret Akrigg, John Short, Wendy Orr and Mavis Nelson.

Lyn R

2.3 Point 1203 - Robin Martakies wanted reassurance over the proposals to introduce a new tenancy agreement in that it is only new tenancies that will have the changes to succession and not current tenancies. This was confirmed.

2.4 Point 1204 – Robin Martakies asked about representation by tenants on the board. Cath advised that this would be covered in the next item.

### 3. Governance

3.1 Cath Purdy gave a verbal update about the latest news on the governance review. She reminded the Committee about the need to improve governance at the same time as driving forward the new business strategy which included better efficiency and more homes. She emphasised the healthy position on finances and the recent regulation assurance but the company needed to respond to external influences such as interest rates, inflation and how rent setting will affect us in the future. There also needs to be clarity about our services so that tenants know what to expect from their landlord.

3.2 Cath said that the board had listened to concerns raised regarding tenants representation on the board as part of a move to a skills base. Cath confirmed that the board will consider an option for there to be 2 tenants represented on the board along with 2 councillors. Cath highlighted that there was an imminent vacancy which the Committee agreed to be advertised openly. Paul Athersmith questioned how would you define skills for a board and Cath replied that this was the reason behind the new competency framework. Robin Martakies was pleased to hear a softening in attitude by the board and feels that there is no better skill than to be a tenant. Dorothy Dixon asked how positions on the board are advertised. Cath Purdy explained that it is done through the newspaper and through the Tenants' Committee. There was also a reminder that tenants can apply completely independently. Cath commented that there would need to be a change in the rules and that this could not be agreed until the AGM September but all agreed to work towards this new approach in the meantime.

3.3 **Board Competency Framework** - Robin Martakies felt that the framework was very clear and good that board skills are reviewed. It was also a good document for assessing training needs. Charles Howarth also pointed out that those who were put forward and not elected could be offered training. John Mansergh agreed to change the framework to make it clearer that being a tenant was a skill although all agreed that tenant board members have to consider the views of the wider tenants and future tenants.

John M

### 4. Rent Setting and Financial Plan

4.1 Lindsay Simons presented a South Lakes Housing Rent Setting with a summary of changes made by government over recent years. She explained that rents are set on a government based formula and that our main source of income is from rents. The cumulative loss of income to SLH over the last 5 years was around £8M with last year's (and concurrent for the next 3 years) 1% rent cut causing the business to rethink business priorities and a new efficiency drive.

4.2 Lindsay explained that at a recent away day the board had gone through various scenarios 'stress testing' on what will break SLH or bring it back. This was an effective process to identify what boards members see as priorities for the future.

4.3 There is continued pressure from the regulator to justify our costs and potentially with a new regulator to look at a wider range of performance measures and customer satisfaction. Loraine Birchall commented that the new regulator was going to be charging for regulation at £5 per unit. At a cost of approx. £15,000 to SLH.

4.4 Win Sayers asked about how the change in benefits had affected our arrears. SLH is aware that this is creeping and has gone through a restructure with its housing officers and customer services teams. There are now dedicated staff who are focusing on rent arrears. Also a reminder that Chris Parks Financial Inclusion Officer is available. Charles thanked Lindsay for the presentation and also for thanks to be passed to her staff for continuing to 'weather the storm'.

## 5. Cost Sharing Vehicle (CSV)

5.1 Richard Hayes gave a verbal presentation. Two Castles are going to go ahead but Impact Housing and Eden Housing have currently withdrawn. The first meeting took place looking at legal documentation and formation of a subsidiary company. There will be a soft start in January with works to take place fully across South Lakes with Two Castles in March. The CSV could look at further expansion in the North to take in all Two Castles stock and also programme of works for kitchens and bathrooms. Also Gas Services works will be offered externally in October 2017. There is also interest from a housing provider in Barrow with 600 units and 2,000 units in South Lakes.

5.2 Charles Howarth asked if private Landlords in the South could access the CSV. Currently this is not feasible due to HMRC and the amount of taxable work that can take place in a subsidiary company.

5.3 Stephen Bolton asked how long it would take to do repairs. Richard Hayes explained that it will take longer but completed in the required time. Currently work is carried out quicker than most expect and will now move to a more realistic timescale. The CSV is a way of not laying off staff after completing the 'promises' but also reducing SLH costs. Both Robin Martakies and John Short agreed for the need to look closely at the performance of this service over the next few months.

5.4 Jim Layfield asked who the board was on the subsidiary company and Richard confirmed that it was the CEO's and Assets Directors from SLH and Two Castles.

5.5 Loraine Birchall asked about staffing and TUPE implications. Possibly looking at staff being TUPE'd over but this is still at an early stage.

## 6. Offer Document Promises

6.1 The item was deferred until the January meeting as time was running out and the wrong paper had been circulated.

John M

## 7. Kitchens and bathrooms

7.1 A verbal report given by Lisa Maguire requesting the Committee's views on proposed changes to the service offering to help improve cost efficiency and ongoing maintenance.

- A decorating pilot project had been carried out where tenants have the choice to either receive a voucher for between £35 and £50 for an SLH decorator to do it. Currently the take up is 54% for the vouchers. The cost for an SLH decorator to do 2 days is £600. Obviously the higher take up on vouchers the higher cost saving. Tenants Committee approved the policy to offer vouchers as long as vulnerable customers still have the option for SLH to undertake the decorating.
- Removal of walls - tenants have been asking for walls between kitchen/outhouse or larder cupboard or downstairs loo to be removed to make

the kitchen larger. SLH do not want to remove walls unless the room fails Housing Health and Safety Rating System. This saves SLH minimum of £2,500 per property that requests this work. Tenants' Committee agreed that this should be the policy going forward.

- Tenant Alterations - it is proposed that surveyors will charge an admin fee for pre and post inspections of work. The charge would be within the range of £35-£50. Tenants' Committee agreed to the charge but felt it was low and should cover the costs at the very least.
- Stock condition surveys - it was proposed that kitchens will not be automatically replaced after 15 years. Kitchens will now be inspected and will either be replaced if deemed necessary or 're life' (life cycle extended) if still in good condition. Tenants' Committee acknowledged the offer document promises which were coming to an end but also emphasised that they have for some time thought SLH was wasting money ripping out perfectly good kitchens and bathrooms.

7.2 Sue Layfield had a query regarding flooring and Lisa Maguire explained that all flooring is covered under a 1 year warranty but afterwards this becomes the tenants' responsibility.

## **8. Quarter 2 Performance & Star Survey**

8.1 John Mansergh outlined the key challenges this quarter; rent arrears and delayed acquisitions from developers. He said that there was a role for the Committee to monitor the performance of the repairs service much closer next year as the CSV begins operating.

8.2 The Committee discussed the results of the latest customer satisfaction survey. Members felt that the survey result was good but in part was a reflection on the changes in sheltered housing and other welfare pressures. James Layfield mentioned that the recent flooding would have been a factor as many tenants had to wait longer for repairs to be carried out.

## **9. Flooding**

9.1 The cost of the flooding was over £2M to SLH and there is currently an ongoing programme of resilience work including an outstanding grant with SLDC.

9.2 John Mansergh reported that there had been a big push for tenants to take up contents insurance and 10 flooded properties had taken it out. Dorothy Dixon and James Layfield both confirmed that the deal that tenants can get via SLH is outstanding value.

## **10. SLH Board minutes and draft Agenda**

10.1 Due to the length of the meeting, there were no comments or questions raised about the minutes or agenda.

## **11. Dates of 2017 meetings**

11.1 The Committee agreed the following dates for meetings during 2017:

- January 12<sup>th</sup>
- March 9<sup>th</sup>
- May 19<sup>th</sup>
- July 6<sup>th</sup>
- August 31<sup>st</sup> (AGM)
- September 14<sup>th</sup>
- November 9<sup>th</sup>

**12. Any other business**

12.1 None

**13. Date of next meeting**

13.1 12<sup>th</sup> January 2017 – 10.30am Windermere Suite

13.2 The meeting closed at 13:00hrs