

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

10:30am Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> March 17 held in the  
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal

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

Guests John Holmes- Board Chairman (Part)

Staff in  
attendance: Cath Purdy - Chief Executive (Part)  
John Mansergh - Assistant Director of Business Improvement  
Lyn Richardson - Community Engagement Officer- Minutes  
Lisa Maguire -  
Stephen Roe - (Part)  
Elaine Glennon -  
Lynne Huxley- (Part)  
Alison Kinnon - (Part)

Apologies: Linda Joy, Win Sayers

Circulation: As above

### **ACTION**

#### **1. Minutes of previous meeting (12<sup>th</sup> January 2017)**

1.1 Agreed as a true record.

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

Dorothy Dixon asked for clarification regarding her role on the Complaints panel. Committee confirmed that she was voted onto the complaints panel and that it will be advantageous as Dorothy is a leaseholder.

Robin Martakies asked about how the meeting went regarding the Senior Management Team ownership of customer care. John Mansergh confirmed that the meeting went well and that SLH would be utilising the Customer Relationship Management system better e.g. getting back to tenants quicker.

Robin Martakies raised that there is still an ongoing issue with Bollard Lights on Kirkfield. SLH has previously maintained this but has not done so for the last year as they are actually SLDC responsibility. Ian Mitchell has been chasing this up but has not yet had any correspondence. Lisa Maguire confirmed that Ian Mitchell is still chasing this.

### 3. Emergency Repair Jobs

Lisa Maguire talked about tenants not being in for arranged appointments and that staff are sending out invoices to tenants which are then not being paid. For example in January there were 35 missed appointments at a cost of £35 per appointment. The process for this is 2 missed appointments and then on the system there is a record so that if the tenant calls the next appointment they miss it will be recharged.

This is also happening with emergency jobs where the tenant is not in and SLH staff have moved jobs around to fit in the work. Charles Howarth suggested that repair staff could maybe call the tenant half an hour before and used examples in other industries where this is done.

Loraine Birchall suggested if there could be a key stored for each property so that access could be gained but SLH is unable to do this through the tenancy agreement.

Further suggestions were that tenants could be informed through the newsletter and also if a tenant is called half an hour before and they are not in then they are not coming.

Lisa Maguire will speak to finance and the repairs team to gain statistics on number of missed appointments and cost associated with this. Lisa will then look at a proposal for how tenants are recharged for missed appointments and bring this back to the meeting.

LM

The next point raised was that there is a 6 month contract with Bell group but if SLH goes in with other housing providers for a period of 1 year then there will be a 3% reduction in cost. The Committee approved this proposal and this would be reflected in the new service standards.

LM

Robin Martakies asked for further clarification of the £600 cost for decorating. The cost is full cost recovery which includes preparation, materials, vehicle costs and pension contributions. Lisa Maguire explained that it is quite costly to SLH so by providing a voucher it is a cost saving and our decorator can be moved to other jobs. Dorothy Dixon asked whether any reductions would be reflected in the leaseholder charge and this was confirmed.

John Short felt that Bell group provided an excellent service and both there interior and exterior paint work was 1<sup>st</sup> Class.

### 4. Policy for allocation of former sheltered vacancies

Lynne Huxley explained that the government is due to make changes to limit housing benefit entitlement (to Local Housing Allowance caps) which is due to come into force in 2019. It is likely that when these changes take place there will be a shortfall in the local housing allowance and the rent charged. Additionally, there was also falling demand for sheltered housing leading to difficulties in letting so additional flexibility was required to maximise income.

In the first instance SLH would look at offering de sheltered housing to a younger age group over 55 and then over 45 years. It was clarified that SLH would not de shelter a property and then put in someone who is 21.

Charles Howarth used the example of Mary Fell in Sedbergh where some properties have been vacant for over 2 years.

John Short wanted clarification from a practical point of view if the scheme becomes dispersed and there are more general needs tenants then who will be paying the amenity charge. Also that there are some very nice properties in sheltered schemes and if they became de sheltered would they then lend themselves to Right to Buy.

There was a general discussion by the group regarding the type of tenants that might move in and some concern over younger tenants. Several tenants however felt that younger tenants and children should not be pre judged.

Alison Kinnon explained that mixed communities work well and that if there were any issues regarding neighbour nuisances then SLH would still tackle these issues and if necessary go to court. If it was a private property then there could still be a court injunction put into place if there was a nuisance. Properties would be eligible for RTB and the amenity charge had to be covered by sheltered tenants so it was imperative to reduce the operating costs to reflect this foreseeable problem.

Dorothy Dixon commented that if it was a leaseholder then SLH could still take back the lease.

John Short queried how many SLH is considering to become de sheltered. Lynne Huxley is currently unsure about the exact statistics. So far there has only been 1 at Mary Fell so it is not happening a lot.

June Peckston wanted to know how it would affect Kirkby Lonsdale. Lynne explained that Binfold Croft and Lunefield Gardens may have some that are de sheltered but this will be depend on when they are advertised and if they are filled. This is not always the case for this area. Another example is Thrimby Court where the ground floor remain sheltered and then general needs above.

The Committee noted the proposed new policy for de-sheltering.

## **5. Rent Statements**

Stephen Roe presented the new Rent Statement and went through the new layout which will make it easier for tenants to understand and for SLH to highlight important issues such as rent owed and financial help available. He explained that there is a section that will be colour coded with Red, Orange and Green to show where tenants are up to with their rent. They will be categorised on how in debt the tenant is and offer advice depending on which level they are at.

The statement will obviously be current on the day that it is written and 4 weekly arrears will be taken into account.

Robin Martakies asked whether there were opportunities for further information to be displayed on the Rent Statement and tenants made several comments about what could be useful. Stephen Roe agreed that there different messages would be displayed depending on the different messages we needed to portray.

The statements will be rolled out in April and then September however in 2018 they will coordinated to be sent out in march which will match more with year-end.

There were many positive comments from tenants regarding the statement including how professional it looks and that it is a really good way of reaching each tenant. It was also highlighted that it could be a useful way of letting tenants know how many repair and emergency appointments are missed and the cost to the company.

## **6. Garage Strategy**

Elaine Glennon explained that there are 1000 garages over 67 sites. The garages are not well maintained and the strategy is looking at options such as; investment, demolishing or selling. There is a stock condition survey which is currently being commissioned to identify the next steps for garages.

Elaine asked for views on the strategy and what needs to be considered. Robin Martakies commented that if garages are removed and housing built that there should be provision for parking. Robin also gave examples of garages close to where he lives with some of the issues such as garages not actually being used for cars but for storage. He has also been told there will be no repairs to garages but considering how much people pay for a garage then roofs should be repaired.

Cath Purdy explained that garages are not a top priority but is concerned that the survey is likely to reveal additional cost pressures which needed to be reviewed.

Elaine posed the question from comments about some for the garage sites being turned into storage units, if this is what people are using them for already. Sue Layfield explained that for some tenants living in flats they rely on garages for storing garden equipment and that if it was turned into parking then there would be nowhere to store it.

Several tenants commented that the garage sizes are not fit for purpose anyway as cars are larger than the garage space. If you knock the garages down then there is more space for parking.

John Short queried how much income is received from garages. Elaine confirmed that for 15/16 it was £446,000.

## **7. Performance Report**

John Mansergh presented his Risk and Performance report which highlighted the renewed focus on income management, customer care and new development.

There is now a specialist Income Team and Income manager in place.

A customer care action plan had been approved following the disappointing STAR survey result.

The Board has agreed a Development Strategy and recently approved projects for acquiring properties from private developers - 29 properties at a cost of 2.6m. They are under 106 agreement and are based in Brigsteer and Levens.

JM

Robin Martakies asked on behalf of another tenant who was carrying out the window cleaning contract for sheltered housing. John Mansergh thought that this had been recently awarded to UPM but would check the details and report back.

JM

## **8. Governance Update**

Cath Purdy explained that recruitment to the Board vacancy was taking place with 19 people applying with some very strong candidates. The interview panel will be Cath Purdy, George Taylor and John Holmes.

She explained that there had been a big change in the last year to board composition in terms of the move to a skills based board. The composition has previously been 4 members from South Lakeland District Council, 4 members who are tenants and 4 external members. The composition has now been agreed and will be 2 tenant representatives and 2 council members with the 8 other vacancies available through open recruitment. Cath commented that the rules need to be tidied up and that the new changes have to be formally adopted. This is normally done through an AGM but that is quite a way of so there is going to be a general meeting in May or June which will adopt the rules.

Robin Martakies asked who would be attending and it was confirmed that the meeting was open to shareholders.

SLH priority is still maintaining and repairing homes but there is a focus on the development of new homes. There is also opportunities for joint working and developing a more commercial aspect to the business.

SLH is going to refinance for £40million as there is more capacity to do this now but with this adds more risk to the business.

In terms of performance of the Board there would be a formal appraisal every year and this would be an external independent assessment every other year.

There has been a reduction in the number of committees to 2. They are now Audit and Risk and the other is Governance and Remuneration.

There will be a focus on stress testing as some Housing Associations have been downgraded due to lack of risk management and stress testing undertaken by the Board.

Cath reported that there has been a move towards remunerating to pay non-executive Boards. Even though this can be a same amount it is recognition that people are giving up there time to do this. It has been shown that it can build a psychological contract between board member and the organisation.

Robin Martakies asked if Cath felt that the higher number of applications was due to the comment about Remuneration in the advert. Cath could not specifically answer this as they had not yet been interviewed.

John Short felt strongly that the Chairman should be paid a remuneration and possibly the Independents at a lower rate. John had reservations about payments to others. He also mentioned that since the start of the ALMO the Board members had become better qualified and are now a valuable asset to SLH.

John Holmes said that the Board has not decided yet regarding the remuneration but wanted the ability to have that flexibility within the Rules should it later be debated. The Board believed that the operating environment had changed and that it needed greater skills sets than before.

The key point from this discussion is that the constitution needs changing to accommodate any such change which tenants agreed needed to be done to allow flexibility.

## **9. Customer Services Scrutiny Review Group**

John Mansergh briefly reviewed the role of a scrutiny review and explained the process for doing this. Initially this would be unpicking the scope to include How is SLH complying with the regulatory standards and its own policies. Secondly, gathering evidence from managers, interviews or other methods and lastly a report to Cath and the Board with recommendations for improving service. The reports will focus on performance against the regulatory standards, cost and quality.

Other points include that no tenant Board members can be involved as there is a conflict of interest.

Also other tenants can be involved in the review who do not necessarily attend Tenants Committee. The Committee agreed that John should approach Sara Brown.

Tenants who are interested in doing this are Paul Athersmith, Gwen Orr, John Short, Sue and Jim Layfield.

Several Committee members expressed their approval for this way of involvement and how it is good to get in early to review services and how this can impact on future decisions.

## **10. February Board Agenda**

There was clarification that the Board minutes have not been approved yet and that is the reason that they have not yet been presented to Tenants Committee.

John Short Queried 3.2 on the agenda and asked for clarification on the Ratification of Kendal Parks. It was explained that this is a 106 purchase of new builds properties.

## **11. Presentation on 5 years since transfer**

John Mansergh did a presentation on the last 5 years and showed a short video clip acknowledging the completion of the offer document promises.

The presentation was well received by Tenants' Committee who felt proud that SLH had delivered the promises and in some cases far exceeded them. John Short noted that he was the Board member present during the signing of lengthy legal documents on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 2012 and remembered a Councillor saying that the majority of promises would not be achieved – it is good to be able to prove it.

The Tenants' Committee were presented with a celebratory cake and congratulated for their help in delivering the promises and securing investment into tenant homes. John Short was nominated to cut the cake which he did with pleasure.

## **12. Final Offer Document Monitoring**

The Committee agreed to sign of the completed promises. It was accepted that sheltered housing provision is different now compared to 5 years ago due to the significant funding pressures.

## **13. Members Reports**

No reports

## **14. Any other business-**

Charles Howarth presented 'A message in a bottle'. This is a small bottle which can be used to put medical information in and then stored in the Fridge. A green sticker is

then used to put in the front door window of you house and then one on the fridge door.

Lyn Richardson explained that Chris Parks would like any tenants that are interested in reviewing the current tenant contents insurance document to make themselves known at the end of the meeting.

**15 Date of next meeting**

18<sup>th</sup> May 2017 – 10.30am Windermere Suite

The meeting closed at 12:50hrs.