

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES

10:30am Thursday 18th May 17 held in the
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal

Present: Charles Howarth (Chair)
John Short
Paul Athersmith
Wendy Orr (Part)
Mavis Nelson (Part)
Robin Martakies
Dorothy Dixon
Stephen Bolton
Linda Joy

Guests N/A

Staff in attendance: Cath Purdy - Chief Executive (Part)
Lyn Richardson - Community Engagement Officer- Minutes
Alison Kinnon - (Part)
Chris Parks- Financial Inclusion Officer (Part)
Gordon Sisson- Sheltered Housing Manager (Part)
Fiona Harrison- Customer Services Manager(Part)
Rosie Gregg- Team Leader Customer Services (Part)

Apologies: Kenny Mayo, Margaret Akrigg, Win Sayers, Jim and Sue Layfield and
Lorraine Birchall.

Circulation: John Mansergh – Assistant Director of Business Improvement
As above

ACTION

1. Minutes of previous meeting (9th March 2017)

1.1 Agreed as a true record.

2. Matters arising

Robin Martakies confirmed that nothing had still been done regarding the bollard lights on Kirkfield and that they are definitely SLDC responsibility.

He also reported that regarding the window cleaning at West Ing that it was now only communal and public areas that get cleaned. Robin vigorously opposes this and believes that UPM should do tenant windows as they have always done.

Lyn Richardson confirmed that this is the case and that the contract is only for UPM to clean the Communal and public windows.

All agreed that this would be discussed when Gordon Sisson attends later in the meeting.

3. Proposal that Linda Joy formally joins the Committee

Charles Howarth introduced Linda Joy and explained that after attending the last Tenants' Committee meeting she would formally like to join. Robin Martakies proposed Linda and Stephen Bolton seconded. Everyone welcomed Linda and thanked her for joining.

4. Governance update

Cath Purdy gave an update on changes that SLH will have to make to its rules regarding board composition and the outcome of the recent recruitment of Board members to a 'skills based Board'.

The committee in December agreed to a change the current composition of 4 representatives from the council, 4 tenant representatives and 4 independents to 2 council representatives, 2 tenant representatives and 8 independents. This is in recognition of the governance review that took place in 2016 and reflected the changing business and economic challenges, alongside the rent reduction. It is in the best interests of tenants for a skills based Board and has not been a knee jerk reaction but a long thorough process.

The Board used a skills matrix to look at what is needed for the future of SLH. This resulted in a mix of skills being required but predominately around commercial, business and development as we should be building more homes. Currently we do not have this level of skills at Board and officer level.

An advert for additional board directors went out January and resulted in 20 applications. 10 applicants were interviewed and resulted in 5 very strong candidates were chosen for appointment (dependant on rule changes).

There are 2 positions that need to be filled after 1 council member and 1 tenant member left in December. A special meeting in June will formally consider amending the current SLH rules regarding the composition of the Board. If this is approved then the 5 candidates will be recommended for appointment..

The longest that someone can stand on a board is for 3 terms (9 years) as the regulatory authority would have concerns if longer as the board can become outdated. The 9 year maximum is compliant with the code of governance that SLH have adopted.

David Richardson is stepping down in September alongside Philip Dixon. Emma Beresford has confirmed that she will be stepping down.

The 5 candidates fill the 'skills mix' identified by the Board and most are local to South Lakes.

Keith Bevan was for the last year a Co-optee on the Audit and Risk committee.

Michael Hulme has been involved in research for the last 20 years in particular technological changes.

Maggi Morris has been involved in health and has good connections with the health service and is committed to improving health and well-being of residents.

Eve Martin has chaired a national charity which brought together 14 smaller charities. Ian Munro is Chief Executive of New charter Housing Association and previously a board member of the National Housing Federation.

Charles Howarth commented that it is vital for SLH to have as much knowledge as possible and will be vital to SLH future. He also felt that it will be good for SLH to be seen from a different angle.

Dorothy Dixon commented on whether the new Board members going to be paid? Is this what attracted them to SLH? Cath did not think that remuneration was a factor in the candidates applying to become Board members and that they want to contribute to SLH success 100%. The advert did state the payment was under consideration. Also the remuneration package has not yet been passed in SLH rules.

Robin Martakies is pleased that Councillor Holmes is still on the Board and has been a key strength throughout. He felt that there is a lack of social media in any strategies and this needs to develop. Cath agreed that this is lacking and that none of the candidates have social media in field but that Michael Hulme has knowledge of how technological changes can help tenants.

John Holmes, George Taylor and Cath Purdy sat on the panel. Robin Martakies asked for clarification on what George Taylor did to actively recruit new Board directors as he was also on the interview panel which may be seen as a conflict of interest.

Cath Purdy confirmed that all Board directors were asked to share the advert through their business networks and let people know about the up and coming posts.

George Taylor was personally thanked for actively encouraging candidates and he know both those that were successful. Cath is very pleased how the recruitment went and believes that is was much more effective than solely through the newspaper.

Robin Martakies is concerned about how old the people are and would like an indication of age. Cath explained that the majority were around 50 but maybe some are 60. Cath also explained that an appointment would not be determined by age.

Linda Joy is concerned that there is a dramatic reduction of tenants on the board. What voice will 2 tenants have on the Board? Tenants should have a huge value. Charles Howarth explained that by being tenant you have an extra skill but you still need to be able to show your skills through the skills matrix to be on the Board. If there were 12 tenants with the skills required then in theory there could be a Board of 12 tenants.

John Short would like to commend the board for getting to this point. John asked if the Governance rating has been downgraded. Cath Purdy explained that a deep dive (in depth review) of the Audit and Risk Committee takes place. A governance review has to take place otherwise the regulatory would have significant concerns if this was not done. The regulator tests the board around risk and for financial viability SLH is still rated as G1 and V1. Other Housing Associations have been downgraded because of this which potentially has an impact on funders.

Cath Purdy confirmed that at the special meeting on 15th June tenant's shareholders will be able to decide on the new rules.

Tenants get thirty three and a third vote, SLDC get thirty three and a third vote, independents get thirty three and a third vote. They are weighted. All shareholders are all contacted by letter 14 days prior to the meeting.

Robin Martakies confirmed that although he is a member of Tenants Committee he will be making his own decision on the day as a shareholder.

Cath Purdy confirmed that she would want to know before going to the special meeting if the committee was not in agreement as she felt that the changes had been with Tenants Committee.

Tenants Committee all agreed that they are in favour of the new rule changes.

Special note after the meeting; Special General Meeting date changed from June to 19th July.

5. Tenants Contents Insurance

Chris Parks explained that 3 years ago a competitive tendering process took place between Marsh and Thistle. Marsh won and it was agreed at that time that in 3 years it would be under review in 3 years. This was due to take place now but Thistle were not keen to get involved, so SLH has continued with Marsh. SLH are happy with the service that Marsh provides.

There are currently 76 live policies and the schemes performance is very positive.

The overall offer is for tenants to be encouraged to take out insurance with the Marsh scheme being suggested at sign up.

There are a few differences with the minimum sum assured/level of cover has now been reduced to £4,000 (was £6,000).

To note the insurance gardens sheds, outbuildings, garages, green houses and pedal cycles are now included in the main cover.

Houses that were flooded or tenants moving into flooded properties are still eligible for Marsh Insurance.

6. Scrutiny reviews: Customer care 26th May and 16th June

Lyn Richardson confirmed the dates for the 1st Scrutiny review but unfortunately Wendy Orr and Paul Athersmith are unable to attend.

Lyn Richardson will contact Sue and Jim Layfield and Sara Brown to confirm attendance.

LR

To note Fridays are not a good day for Paul Athersmith and Wendy Orr.

7. Sheltered housing update

Gordon Sisson reported that the Hubs had now been running for 6 months successfully, although there are still some technical issues regarding communication. Some from Tenants' Committee took up the offer of attending the hubs to see how they are working.

Gordon explained that he is taking the business case to Executive Management Team (EMT) regarding the Independent living offer and to put into place a team leader.

The role of team leader would be to co-ordinate daily activities so that Gordon can focus on preparing the business plan for September Board meeting. EMT confirmed that they would be happy with the Team leader position as a secondment for 10 months.

Gordon is also working on a full update on sheltered services for the board in September.

Robin Martakies is concerned about West Ing and the window cleaning contract as the contractor only cleans the communal and public windows. Gordon confirmed that this is the case and always has been it's just that tenants often asked for the window cleaner to do it and then it got added on to SLH bill. Gordon explained that he would work with the Independent Living Officers (ILO) to compile a database of window cleaners local to that scheme.

Several committee members raised issues around these types of services and associated charges. In light of this it may be appropriate for service charges to be an agenda item for clarification. GS/AR

Linda Joy raised the issue that the deep clean at Castle walk had not been done correctly and that the stairs were still dirty. Gordon responded that a deep clean had been done but due to contractors making a mess after fitting windows that a more specialised chemical clean was needed. This is currently being discussed with the external contractor and Andy Rushton. GS

Gwen Orr raised an issue around some ILO'S who have attitude and that a huge padlock has been fitted to one of the kitchen cupboards. Gordon took this information away and will deal with it. GS

Linda Joy raised on behalf of Margaret Akrigg the buzzer system and new doors. Gordon explained why this is happening and is going to look at 'a how to do it' piece in the scheme newsletter. It is also something the ILO's can do at the coffee mornings. GS

Gordon has also put in a request to asset team to check that the doors are fit for purpose. GS

Robin Martakies and John Short also mentioned how dirty it is at the side entrance of Wet Ing. Gordon will get an ILO to check this.

John Short expressed concern from his and other sheltered schemes regarding the removal of scheme managers. Also the 1.5 % reduction in amenity charge does not equate to what sheltered have lost.

Alison Kinnon explained that the amenity charge has not yet fully in place until the next financial year.

Gordon explained that the ILO's will be going through Client Information Sheets with tenants and that they will be asking about perceptions of service.

The service is still developing and being enhanced as it has only been running for 6 months.

There was further discussion on service charges but as mentioned above this will be an agenda item so that it can be discussed further.

John Short asked about Choice Based Lettings (CBL). He has found a property at West Ing that is on CBL and is identical to John's but is £10 higher. Also a flat at Birthwaite is £30 cheaper than at West Ing. Alison Kinnon explained that it was £10 higher because new tenancy is set up at Formula rent. The flat at Birthwaite is the old office and much smaller in size.

Wendy Orr and Mavis Nelson left the meeting for an appointment.

8. New Tenancy Agreement

Alison Kinnon explained that for the last 6 months they have been working on the New Tenancy Agreement by looking at the existing policy and other organisations.

Trowers and Hamblins law firm were also contacted for advice in which they directed SLH to Mosscares in Manchester.

Rosie Gregg explained the main changes which we are looking to change or strengthen are;

- To start tenancy on any day of the week rather than just a Monday. This stops properties being void for a few days and rent being lost.
- Also moving to a 52 week rent weeks rather than 48 which ties in better with managing direct debits but also Housing Allowance payments.
- Introduce the ability to use Ground 8 for possession proceedings for rent arrears, this is a mandatory ground for eviction if at both the date of the service of the notice and at the date of the sharing at least 8 weeks rent is unpaid.
- To limit tenants to the statutory rights with regards to succession and assignment.
- To introduce a clause around data protection and informal sharing.
- To introduce a clause around mobility scooters.
- To strengthen the agreement with regards to access issues for gas/electrical servicing and repairs.

Robin Martakies thanked Rosie for her clear, refreshing and precise report.

Lyn Richardson confirmed that those not attending the meeting will have a copy sent out.

LR

If anyone has any comments then please could they reply within the next weeks to Alison Kinnon.

AK

9. Board Meeting April minutes

No issues were raised as those that had comments to make felt that they had already been answered during the meeting.

10. Member Reports: Tenants Complaints Panel

Stephen Bolton commented that the meeting had gone well but that further training was required particularly around confidentiality. The group had worked on a redacted document.

Linda Joy expressed concern regarding the process and the impact that the complaints panel would have if they decided it did not meet the criteria for the Ombudsman.

There was a thorough discussion regarding the process and it was agreed that further discussion would take place with John Mansergh who is leading this panel.

JM

11. Any other Business

Dorothy Dixon noted that on the February minutes the 'SLH will charge tenants for additional services such as cleaning communal areas, etc. based on the actual costs of the services provided'. This is a change to the normal fixed figure.

All agreed that this could be addressed under amenity/service charges which has already been raised as an agenda item.

AK

12. Date of next meeting

6th July 2017 – 10.30am Windermere Suite

The meeting closed at 12:55hrs.