

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES

10:30am Thursday 6th July 17 held in the
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal

Present: Charles Howarth (Chair)
John Short
Paul Athersmith
Wendy Orr
Sue and Jim Layfield
Dorothy Dixon
Stephen Bolton
Lorraine Birchall
June Peckston

Guests N/A

Staff in attendance: Lyn Richardson - Community Engagement Officer- Minutes
Fiona Harrison- Customer Services Manager (Part)
Max Bibby- Team Leader: Housing Part)
John Mansergh – Assistant Director (Quality & Performance)

Apologies: No apologies

Circulation: As above

ACTION

1. Minutes of previous meeting (18th May 2017)

1.1 Agreed as a true record.

2. Matters arising

Charles Howarth explained that he had received an email from Robin Martakies to explain that he would be stepping down from tenants committee. Charles surmised that this may be due to changes in board membership and tenants, alongside other issues that he has raised such as the New Tenancy agreement.

Everyone was unanimous in their support for all the work that Robin has done on behalf of representing tenant's views and challenging policy and process. John Mansergh commented that Tenants' committee and South Lakes Housing was a better place for the work that Robin had done over the years. He will be greatly missed and is one of the best scrutineers he had ever come across.

Charles also opened a letter from Margaret Akrigg explaining that she is also stepping down from Tenants' Committee and wishes the group every success in the future. The group again wished her every success.

Charles also explained that Linda Joy had stepped down for personal reasons.

The Committee wanted to note that although several members had resigned there was still an open door if they wanted to come back.

John Short confirmed that he replied to Rosie Gregg 3 to 4 days after the meeting with 5/6 points around the new tenancy agreement. John was quite happy as he received an answer within 3 days of his enquiry.

John M updated the group regarding the Tenants Complaint panel. The Tenants Complaint panel is not yet registered with the housing ombudsman. Tenants do not have to go through a Tenant Complaint panel and can go direct through to Tenant Ombudsman. Under the Localism Act Tenants have to wait 8 weeks before the complaint can go to Ombudsmen but if it went through the Tenants Complaint panel they can waive the 8 weeks. John confirmed that panel cannot stop a complaint going to the Ombudsmen.

3. **New Policies- Leasehold Management and Abandoned Tenancies**

The **Leasehold Management Policy** has been updated from 2014-2015. Max Bibby explained that it is hard to get a generic approach but there are 9 significant changes to the policy.

All major works will be invoiced along with annual service charges in April rather than when the work is finished as previously required. If a challenge were successful SLH would be limited to collect a maximum of £250 rather than full cost of works.

Leaseholders will be given 60 days to clear the balance of any invoice. Arrangements can be made to for payments to be made over a 24 month period especially if the works are thousands of pounds. This will require approval from Head of Customer and Communities.

Ground rent now has its own section rather than a single line sentence as previously but will continue with current practice of invoicing in March.

Introduction of alteration and structural requests with cost £50 plus VAT, if the change is made without permission the cost will be £100 plus VAT. If a structural engineer is required then the tenant will be charged to the nearest 15 minutes. The cost for a structural engineer has been agreed at £35 per hour.

All requests will aim to take 20 days to process. If the tenant requires an urgent decision then these will be considered but will incur an additional £50 cost plus VAT.

Introduction of the 'sale of a property section there are now fees for the following; Solicitor's enquiries (including the LPE 1 form) which now has 80 questions, will cost £100 plus VAT with a turnaround time of 10 days. Notice of consent (Local connection) will be £25 (no VAT is charged by SLDC). Consent from SLDC. £25 no VAT for letters.

The sale of a house will leave the service charge account open until it is cleared. A new service charge account will be started for the new leaseholder.

There will be an extension of leases to 125 year and Right to buy by 90 years but will have to pay conveyancing and solicitors costs. This could be anywhere from £3,000 to £8,000 as an example. It is all based on land value not size of property.

Removed references to Leasehold Valuation Tribunal (LVT) and updated this with 1st Tier Tribunal for disputes with SLH.

There has been updates on the quality and diversity, strategic links and key targets.

Dorothy Dixon is concerned over how these changes will be explained to leaseholders. Max explained that it is not normal practice to inform all leaseholders but that it is available on the website.

There was a discussion on how this new information could be shared with Leaseholders and it was agreed that it would be issued within the Tenants Annual report and service charge statements.

MB

Abandoned Tenancies are under there 3 year review. There are limited changes and in essence most remains the same. There is a new layout with key aims identified.

- To determine quickly where a property is abandoned
- To minimise the rent loss
- To minimise the time a property is unoccupied
- To reduce the cost of storing belongings

There was some discussion around the last aim and as to what this actually meant. Fiona explained that under Torte law you have to notify the tenant of exactly what they have left in the property.

There are now stricter timescales and if someone is out of the property for 3 days then the process for abandoned tenancies can begin. There is a new form for logging and dating information so that the evidence is all in one place.

Fiona commented that this policy is not used very often.

Possession of a property can only be done through a court order and SLH employs a rigorous process before it get to this stage to ensure that the property is truly abandoned.

John S queried what constitutes an abandoned tenancy and Fiona confirmed that it was when a tenant has 'no intention' of returning to their property. For example if someone was going into hospital or prison that that wouldn't be an abandoned tenancy and SLH would work with the tenant, social workers or next of kin.

Sue Layfield asked what would happen if there was an unauthorised occupant. Fiona explained that SLH would still go through due process and only change locks if the property was unsecure. Stickers on windows would inform the tenant that locks had been changed and who to contact.

Fiona concluded that we have high demand for properties in this area so we have low abandonment rates.

4. **Cumbria Housing and Property Services update**

Richard Hayes is on annual leave so John Mansergh presented the paper.

The CH&PS service started with a 'drip drip' approach in January with Two Castles. Completion and satisfaction rates are excellent currently and there has not been any significant impact to SLH tenants thus far. However, SLH is very aware that this is early days and will continue to monitor this so feedback from the Committee is crucial. Early cost analysis shows that the costs seem okay and comparable with external contractors.

There are future growth areas in the North and South of the county with Impact, Eden and Home group. This continues the idea that SLH will become more efficient by providing more repairs, thus spreading overhead and increasing income. The hook for other Housing Association is that they do not have to pay VAT so they are automatically 20% better off.

There is scope for Two Castles work to the North of the county but SLH would have to look at increasing its workforce in other areas and provide satellite depots. Two Castles are also just in the process of merging with Derwent and Solway.

The Gas Servicing contract is coming to an end in October and SLH was reviewing its options including considering bringing it in house. This has since been reviewed by the management team who are looking to extend the current contract given a significant saving has been negotiated. It was agreed that Tenants' Committee would like to recommend Rogersons continue with the gas servicing. Many members gave very positive experiences of their periodic gas check and felt that they could provide an independent service.

John S asked if SLH is confident in gaining good trades people at a good cost? Looking at current situation then no and this is highlighted on the risk register as the biggest risk. SLH is currently reviewing its pension offer to staff and its pay award. To recruit now SLH would not get the trade staff required on the current contracts as pay is too low. It is hoped that after the review that there will be a better balance between the pension offer and pay award, thus enabling recruitment and future growth.

Jim L questioned the 'legal standing' of CH&PS. John M explained that it is a subsidiary of SLH. Other group members enjoy a small share but SLH needed to ensure ongoing viability.

Further discussion took place on electrical checks and the inability to sometimes access sockets when behind wardrobes etc. For further clarification of how this and other repairs are carried out it was agreed to invite Alistair Whitehead (Repairs Operations Manager) to a future meeting.

Lyn R

5. Health and Safety compliance & Fire Safety

John S started by checking about wedges being used to keep main doors open at West Ing, which happens frequently on external and main entrance doors.

Stephen Bolton also mentioned about 1-4 Dragley Beck where a fire action notice sign has been removed.

Ian M

John M agreed to address these issues with Ian Mitchell.

John M advised that SLH is working with Cumbria Fire and Rescue service and Building Control Authorities regarding its Fire Safety. SLH is sharing information with the fire service on any high risk building. Currently there are no buildings which have the aluminium composite cladding but some do have a timber cladding.

The 'stay put' policy is still in place as the correct fire doors ensure that there is enough time for the fire service to arrive. The Fire service are also going through a process of reviewing their advice.

Gwen Orr raised the issue around Fell Close and the fact that there is only 1 entrance to escape. She also mentioned that the kitchen is the closest room to the entrance door and that is most likely place for a fire to start. John M agreed to look into this and explained that Savills will be doing further Fire Risk Assessments. They will identify the risks as low, medium and high.

John M

John M presented the Landlord Compliance Report. The report now declares that we have full compliance, and that SLH had 'raised the ante' on a number of areas such as Asbestos Management and Fire Risk Management.

There has been a changed policy for electrical periodic to every 10 years. In Sept 2016 we had 500 outstanding but we now have 94 left and there is the hope that this will be completed by Aug/Sept. This will however depend if tenants allow access. However, external advice has said that they should be completed every 5 years. Guidance from the electrical industry body advise every 5 years.

Sue L asked about how this works for leaseholders and it was explained that SLH can only enforce in communal areas but would be working closely with Fire and Building Control authorities to put pressure on them. Dorothy D raised the issue around fitting her fire door and how we own the framework but she owns the door. She has been quoted £2,500 for a proper fire door which is too costly to pay. John M will take the issue of affordability to the Fire safety meeting to discuss this issue facing leaseholders.

John M

6. Year-end performance report

John M explained that we meet the decent home standards.

Last year we had good rent collection. There is a 'risk' that when the Welfare Reform is fully rolled out that it will likely increase our arrears. Stephen B also raised that there is a 5 week delay in the benefit being paid out which further adds to the risk that payments will be in arrears.

We have 17 less stock so the Board had recently refinanced with a plan for 250 new homes over the next four years.

Dorothy D produced a newspaper article relating to the houses for sale on Ash Meadow under shared ownership. There followed a discussion round different types of home ownership.

John M explained that prior to the election there was green paper that was due to be tabled but it had not been mentioned in the Queens speech so unsure if it will be debated. This related to the sheltered housing cap.

7. Customer Services Scrutiny Panel

There have been 2 meetings regarding Customer Services Team. A further meeting will take place soon and a report will be produced and presented to a future Tenants' Committee meeting.

8. Annual Report Working group

John M asked for volunteers to be on a working party for the Annual Report. Charles Howarth, June Peckston, Gwen Orr and Loraine Birchall.

New dates will be sent out to those that are interested.

Lyn R

9. Members' Reports

Dorothy D explained that the Cumbria and North Lancs Tenant Forum was looking for new members as some Housing Associations are not represented. There was a discussion by many of the group around the need to still attend these meetings as the committee feels that they are not worthwhile. The group decided to stick with it for another year and review it and to pay the £250 subscription. Dorothy Dixon will provide an agenda and minutes of future meetings.

John M and Charles attended the Northern Housing Consortium Resident Involvement Conference and presented a workshop on the changes to tenant involvement as part of changes to governance. There was a Q and A session and

Dorothy

subsequently John has been in email correspondence with others in the sector about the work that has taken place to change the structure of tenant involvement.

10. Any other business

None

12. Date of next meeting

14th September 2017

AGM 10.30am

Meeting 11.00am

Pie and Peas

The meeting closed at 12:55hrs.