

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

10:30am Thursday 12th July 18 held in the  
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal

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

Guests N/A

Staff in attendance: Lyn Richardson - Community Engagement Officer- Minutes  
John Mansergh – Assistant Director (Quality & Performance)  
Fiona Harrison – Customer Services Manager  
Lisa Maguire- Business Analyst

Apologies: Win Sayers, Mavis Nelson, Wendy Orr, Paul Athersmith, Ian Munro  
(Chair –SLH Board)  
As above

### **ACTION**

#### **1. Minutes of previous meeting (10th May 2018)**

Agreed as a true record

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

Lyn to write a letter to Kenny Mayo thanking him for involvement with Tenants' Committee and explain that he is welcome to return when he feels able to do so.

Lyn R

Lisa M explained that when it is the annual gas check or when a kitchen has come up for renewal some fail the checks, but that does not necessarily mean there is a fault. Charles asked what the process is if a tenants property fails. Lisa explained that the Landlord Gas Safety Record (LGSR) explains abbreviations so that tenants can see what is actually wrong and why it failed. This is then passed to Colin Williams (Gas safety manager) who would normally contact Rogersons to come out and repair the problem. Charles explained his concern not just at a personal level but also that there could be lots of other tenants affected by failed safety checks who do not know what to do. Lisa will follow this up.

Lisa

Lyn explained that the Grounds Maintenance contract had previously been monitored by Community members/champions on their estates, in particular this related to sheltered schemes. However, this is no longer the case and tenants now ring SLH customer services to report any issues with Grounds Maintenance.

Stephen read out a card from Lindsay thanking Tenants' Committee for the flowers and card.

### 3. **Pet Policy**

Fiona explained that this policy was up for review and that there are only a few changes. These changes are reflected in the new Tenancy Agreement so that the two mirror each other.

The Pet Policy and the Pet Policy Agreement are both working well. The Pet Policy Agreement is used for all new sign ups and it can also be used for those that already have pets. It helps both the housing team and the tenant to understand what they are taking on.

Charles asked that there be a change in the wording of the policy (Pg. 4) regarding the word 'poisonous' to 'venomous' as this is a clearer definition.

Fiona

There was a general discussion regarding allergies and members of staff but it concluded that it is up to staff to take responsibility and if this was known, then a Risk Assessment can be put into place.

Loraine explained that there should be an amendment to include clearing up dog mess not just from communal areas but also paths and grass verges. Also regarding keeping a pet safe and warm should be added in or changed to keep a pet at a suitable temperature relevant to their environment.

Fiona

Dorothy wanted to check if the Pet Policy Contract was only aimed at new tenants but this is not the case and it is aimed at all tenants. However not many tenants do complete a contract.

Sue Layfield suggested that there could be a better promotion of the Pet Policy Agreement to tenants through the SLH website, other social media and on the rent statements.

### 4. **Repairs Scrutiny Report**

The 'Repairs' scrutiny group included Paul Athersmith, June Peckston, Stephen Bolton and Charles Howarth who looked at SLH's compliance with the national regulatory standards for 'repairs and maintenance' under the 'Home Standard'.

The group concluded that SLH is complying with the regulators standard in terms of providing a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service. The group also felt that the service standard set by SLH is far higher than the Home Standard.

John went through the 9 recommendations that were agreed with the scrutiny panel. Some of these are listed below;

- Provide tenants with information about asbestos in homes and condensation and damp within the new Repairs Handbook (publish on SLH website)
- Consult Tenants' Committee on the proposals to change the provider for 'out of hours' service.
- Ensure that the new IT system can offer text reminders about repairs appointments.
- Board review of the Adaptations Policy.

Regarding the 'Adaptations Policy' there needs to be a review of whether this is meeting customers' needs or whether this is being overridden by value for money considerations.

The group noted improvements in customer satisfaction but highlighted the problems of sickness levels which had impacted on performance with repair completion times.

John commented that this is the first scrutiny group where there is dispute between the scrutiny panel and management decisions i.e. the recommendation for the Board to review the adaptations policy.

All recommendations are listed as low cost and the Board will need to make a decision if there are higher costs such as changing the Aids and Adaptions Policy.

Charles checked if tenants are aware of how they can report a 'near miss'. This is an area that James Nevett (Health and Safety Manager) is looking into.

The out of hour's service provided by Riverside has been a poor service and when issues have tried to be rectified these have not been dealt with. This then resulted in the provider giving us notice on the contract. Under the current procurement process we are now using Centra with a fixed contract for 1 year. SLH is looking at how it can use Cumbria Housing Partnership (CHP) to procure the out of hour's service in order to bring costs down. SLH will also be looking at procuring other services through CHP such as painting, which will hopefully bring costs down. Unfortunately, in the case of the out of hour's service there was only 1 provider we could pick as no one else came forward.

## **5. Value for Money**

The Regulator of Social Housing revised their VfM Standard in April 2018 requiring Housing Associations to publish evidence of VfM annually within the statutory accounts.

Things that need to be included;

- Business Strategy Objectives
- Demonstrating delivery of VfM
- Strategy for delivering new homes
- Rigorous appraisal of options for improving performance
- Full consideration of costs and benefits of alternative structures
- Non-social housing activity and risks
- Performance against the regulators VfM metrics
- Local Key Performance Indicators, targets, performance comparison with peers and plans to address areas of underperformance.

John has not taken this to the Management team or the Board yet, but would welcome comments from Tenants' Committee first as an important stakeholder in judging VfM.

A question about non-social housing activity was asked and it was confirmed that SLH does not have much commercial activity. To clarify the regulator is not there to stop Housing Associations doing things but it wants to make sure 'it has considered what it is doing' and 'the risk' involved.

John S and Jim asked about Yewbarrow Lodge and what the circumstances were with that now. John M explained that there is an external consultant who is looking into the options for the scheme. Yewbarrow Lodge itself presents several issues in terms of site complexities and the steep access. SLH is pulling out all the stops in terms of trying to rent the properties out but there are a number of empty flats and demand is poor. This has led to flats being advertised through the local estates agents and rental websites.

## **6. Rethinking Social Housing Report**

Over 3,000 took part in the 'Rethinking Social Housing' survey commissioned by the Chartered Institute of Housing, 36 % of whom were tenants.

John M was pleased that the answers to the 4 questions proposed by the CIH, reflected the answers that were given in this Tenants' Committee a few months earlier. The statement (pg 8) indicated that a more apt definition of social housing is 'decent, secure housing, which is affordable to people on low incomes, wherever they may live in the country, provided by not-for-profit organisations'.

Interestingly the report (pg 22) asks to 'suspend the Right to Buy' and explore other ways to help tenants into home ownership and, in the meantime, remove the barriers which prevent local councils from replacing the homes lost through Right to Buy.

## **7. Estate Management Scrutiny Group**

There was a good response for the Estate Management Scrutiny group which will look at the Neighbourhood and Community Standard.

Stephen Bolton (if available), Dorothy Dixon, Charles Howarth, Jim and Sue Layfield, John Short and June Peckston.

The dates are 27<sup>th</sup> Sept (10.30-12.30pm), 18<sup>th</sup> Oct (1.00pm-3.00pm) and 8<sup>th</sup> Nov (10.30am-12.30pm).

## **8. Tenant Annual Report Working Group**

The working group for the Annual Report working group are Stephen Bolton, June Peckston and possibly Paul Athersmith.

Lyn R

The dates for this are 16<sup>th</sup> August (10.30am-12.30pm) and 23<sup>rd</sup> August (11.00am-1.00pm).

## **9. Summary of June Board minutes**

Ian Munro is the new chair of SLH.

A new Board member Councillor Rupert Audland (Milnthorpe and Arnside) replaced Peter Thornton and Councillor John Holmes was renominated by SLDC.

The Board were updated on an input error with the Regulatory Data returns. An internal audit was commissioned following the inaccuracies and it was identified that the mistake was due to 'human error'.

SLH is expecting an In-Depth Assessment (IDA) from the regulator within the year which looks at governance, risk management & financial viability. Impact have already had their assessment and Castles and Coasts are due in July with Eden in August. John M will provide an overview of the IDA process at the next meeting.

John M

The Development Programme includes plans to develop 370 properties between now and 2021. SLH has recently acquired 56 units at Pembroke Court from the Guinness Home Trust, these are all general needs. There are 66 as part of the full deal with Guinness Home Trust with 2 leaseholders and 8 private owners who pay a maintenance fee.

There is another scheme with 4 properties at Nether Kellet with Great Places that will also be acquired.

## 10. **Members Reports**

*Complaints Panel-* John Short felt that the Complaints Panel meeting went extremely well and enabled the group to see the type of tenants that SLH has. John feels that the process would be more effective if there were photographs with the complaint where necessary so that they can make a fair judgement. He feels that the Panel is working well and is not biased to either the tenant or to SLH and that decisions made although sometimes seen with a different slightly view still come up with the same result. The Complaints Panel is now registered with the Housing Ombudsman and is advertised on their website.

*Cumbria and North Lancashire Tenants Forum-* Dorothy reported that the Universal Credit Awareness Day had gone well but that the numbers were low. This was a shame as it had been well publicised by each of the Housing Associations involved. Those tenants that did attend felt that it was 'good' with one tenant commenting '*I'm glad I came I didn't realise that though we have been on UC for 2 years that the 'change' was due to affect us, so now we can be ready and have more insight and hopefully make a smooth transition without any hiccups.*'

## 11 **Any other business**

A tenant survey is planned for September which is currently out to tender. In answer to a question about how tenants are selected for the survey, John M clarified that SLH provides a stock list and the survey company then randomly select who the surveys will go out to.

## 12 **Next Meeting- AGM 13<sup>th</sup> September 10.30am-12.30pm Windermere Suite**

John explained that Loraine will have served her 3 year term at the next Board AGM but is eligible to stand again. At this point anyone else can also stand for election for Board membership. John M needs to know if anyone is interested as he needs to go through the Competency criteria and support tenant applicants through the process. Loraine confirmed that she is interested in standing again. Other members stated that they were not interested. Lyn to contact 4 Tenants Committee members directly to inform of election process to Board.

Lyn R

Election of officers for Tenants' Committee should be received by the end of August indicating which role you would like to be involved in. The election of officers will be Chair, Vice Chair, Cumbria and North Lancashire Forum, Grant Applications Panel, Tenant Complaint Panel.

ALL

The meeting closed at 12.20pm