

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

11:20am Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> September 18 held in the  
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal

Present: Stephen Bolton (Chair)  
John Short  
Paul Athersmith  
Sue Layfield  
Dorothy Dixon  
Charles Howarth  
Lorraine Birchall  
June Peckston  
Win Sayers

Guests N/A

Staff in attendance: Lyn Richardson - Community Engagement Officer- Minutes  
John Mansergh – Assistant Director (Quality & Performance)  
James Nevitt- Health and Safety Manager (part)  
Stephen Roe- Head of Housing (part)

Apologies: Wendy Orr, Mavis Nelson, Jim Layfield

Circulation: As above

### **ACTION**

#### **1. Minutes of previous Meeting (12<sup>th</sup> July 18)**

Agreed as a true record.

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

No matters Arising

#### **3. Safeguarding Policy**

James Nevett presented the new Safeguarding for adults Policy.

Safeguarding has always been covered within SLH through a number of different policies but not as a specific one. This has been done to add a more consistent approach. The policy covers people with learning disabilities, people with mental health issues, older people, people with physical disabilities, and people with visual and sensory impairment, people who rely on others for care and or support.

This policy now enables members of staff to have a reporting structure so that when issues are raised they can be resolved.

There are 3 levels of training currently taking place which includes all office staff. The initial training is awareness raising for all staff. The next level is manager training so that when issues are reported they are interpreted correctly. The next level of training has focused on the safe guard leads/champions which are James Nevett, Gordon Sisson, Fiona Harrison and Sue Boulton. James and Sue will cover safeguarding with employees, Gordon will cover Sheltered schemes and Fiona will cover all other tenancies.

Ultimately SLH will always use Cumbria County Council Safeguarding Team and take guidance from there in terms of next steps. They have already been extremely supportive in terms of helping SLH to understand the correct information to record.

Dorothy asked if there are not estate walkabouts and housing officers as visible anymore in our communities, had this had an impact on reporting any safeguarding issues. James felt that there might be a perceived feeling that staff are not as visible but there are still many visits to estates by the housing management teams and the Independent Living Team do regular checks and surgeries at the schemes.

Win asked why it is only directed at adults. James explained that there is already a policy for children.

Charles explained that there is a new Domestic Violence service starting soon with the launch on the 8<sup>th</sup> October, at the Nan Tait in Barrow. Previously it had been the Let Go service run by Impact Housing but it is now run by Women Aid.

Sue explained that she feels she is going to be a whistle blower and wanted to know how she would be treated if she rang Customer Services. James explained that all safeguarding issues are treated confidentially and that the issue would be escalated if necessary.

The committee agreed that there needs to be something on our website regarding Safeguarding for Adults.

James N

#### **4. Housing and Customer Service Update**

Stephen Roe gave an overview of the teams that he manages.

The Housing Options team is a member of Cumbria Choice based lettings where properties are advertised and then bid on. There has been an 8% increase from 2016/17 to 2017/18 in number of applicants registered with SLH.

Most applicants (61%) request a 1 bed need which creates an imbalance with supply and need as there are very little 1 bed properties available.

During 2017/18 we let 189 properties, 45 fewer than in the previous year and is in line with the national trend.

The void turnover rate for the year was 6.1% and when it goes to bidding the most popular property types are ground floor flats which average 48 bids very closely followed by bungalows which averaged 47 bids.

A lot of time with the Housing Option team is spent managing the expectation of bidders.

The Income Management Team have continued to perform very well with collection rates and arrears being the best they have ever been. The dedicated team are working well with supporting tenants but also taking action when necessary.

The proportion of rent collected was once again over 100% and current tenant arrears were reduced by £74,285.

The number of cases with tenants in arrears of over a £1,000 has reduced significantly from 59 in 2016/17 to 35 in 2017/18. In monetary terms this is from £90,000 to £53,000.

The Tenancy Management Team is harder to monitor but is done through number of complaints, ASB performance, number of visits, number of mutual exchanges and successions.

The team have introduced some new processes including a Noise App where tenants can actually record on their phones the issue. This has proved extremely successful in one case where the evidence was crucial for an eviction earlier.

The Customer Services Team have improved their 1<sup>st</sup> Right time performance from 35% to 78% with it now plateauing at the latter. This appears to be the ceiling at where issues can be resolved before it becomes too technical.

There has been an increase from 14% to 31% in digital transactions which has been a natural switch.

John S queried an action on the Customer Services Team regarding reviewing service charges. Stephen confirmed that this will be looked at in this financial year.

Charles queried the letting of properties in Sedbergh and was this difficult. Stephen reported that although the properties might take slightly longer to let they always get let.

Charles also asked about 49 cases of leaseholders in arrears and that this seemed to be very high. Stephen explained that with leaseholders you always get the money back when the property is sold. He further explained that not all the debt is through lack of payment but part of a manged payment due to perhaps a large piece of work being done.

Dorothy asked about Tenancy Assignment and if the person who moves into the property has a RTB after 12 months? Stephen explained that it has to be a close relative who is eligible for Tenancy Assignment and will check out the RTB query.

Stephen  
R

Win asked if there had been any decision yet on Yewbarrow Lodge. John M confirmed that SLH was still waiting for the report from the consultants regarding the options for Yewbarrow Lodge. SLH had wanted to possibly look at it being an extra care facility, but this has been rejected by Cumbria County Council. He explained that there was a lack of demand and access to the scheme was a problem.

The report for Yewbarrow when available will be shared with this committee.

## **5. Service Standard Monitoring**

This item was deferred until the next meeting

## **6. Social Housing Green Paper**

John explained that there is discussion paper on Social Housing which covers 5 key themes. The Green Paper covers; ensuring homes are safe and decent, effective resolution of complaints, empowering residents and strengthening the regulator, tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities and lastly expanding supply and supporting home ownership.

Win asked is there is a Government Directive on the number of people SLH has to take for Asylum Seekers and are there any grants available? John explained that there is no specific directive and that it is all Asylum Seekers support is coordinated by SLDC and SLH worked with them.

The Committee welcomed the efforts to reduce social housing stigma and strengthening standards but criticised the lack of new investment for new-build.

John introduced 'A National voice for tenants?' a survey seeking views from tenants on whether they think their voice is being heard by the government as it plans its response to the recent green paper. Tenants committee completed the survey on line as John read out the questions. The Committee supported the idea of a national forum as long as it is not London-centric.

John also shared an invitation letter from the Housing Minister Kit Malthouse inviting tenants to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government consultation on the green paper, 'A new deal for social housing'. It will take place at the Eitihad Stadium on Thursday 20th Sept from 12.00pm to 3pm with lunch provided. Win Sayers and Charles Howarth put their names forward to go. Charles sends apologies for GAP meeting which falls at the same time on the 20<sup>th</sup> Sept.

## **7. Summary of August Board Meeting**

John gave an overview of the August Board meeting which was attended by 9 Board Directors and a guest observer.

The Board have agreed to purchase 45 rental properties and 2 shared ownership from private developers (s106 agreements) at sites in Burton in Kendal, Milnthorpe Road and Strawberry Fields in Kendal.

In March 2012 South Lakes Housing had 3,156 properties with an average Right to Buy of 20 properties per year. However, this year will be the 1<sup>st</sup> year that SLH has grown with an additional 83 homes (and approximately 18 Right to Buy sales).

Following a Board recruitment process, Kerry Byrne was approved by the Board as a Non-Executive Director, she has a background in finance and auditing. She attended the Board meeting as an observer and will be recommended for appointment at the SLH AGM in September.

## **8. A national voice for tenants? Survey**

See under number 6.

## **9. In- depth Assessment**

The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) is primarily concerned with the Governance and Financial Viability of Housing Associations and is expected to visit between now and April 2019. Currently SLH has provided lots of data to the regulator through quarterly surveys. They also perform an 'annual stability' check which looks at any significant changes in the previous year. For example this year SLH will require an more cash for development which would trigger the regulator to look at this area more closely.

The regulator physically comes into the Association and will attend a Board meeting and meet with the Board Chair, Audit and Risk Committee Chair and the Executive Team. The areas that they look at are 'Strategy' (What are we investing in?), how is SLH 'Structured' and how complex is it?, 'Financial Resilience' (what are the Associations Financial plans), 'Risk' (how the Board are managing risk) and 'Governance' (How does the board operate?)

Currently Eden Housing Association and Castles and Coasts are undergoing this process.

**10. Estate Management Scrutiny Panel**

Due to a clash of dates the proposed Estate Management Scrutiny panel will not take place.

New dates will be sent out after this meeting.

Lyn R

**11. Members Reports**

The annual report working group met twice over August and it is now in the final stages of production. John would like to thank all those that took part in the working group. The report will be sent by emailed to tenants and hard copies to sheltered and those that request it.

Lyn R will send out all meeting dates for GAP, complaints, estate management scrutiny and Tenants Committee meetings.

Lyn R

**12 AOB**

Lyn R asked for any volunteers for the Customer Connect Programme that is being run by SLDC. It is a long-term survey and will be focusing on bringing services up to date with new technology. June and Stephen expressed an interest.

Lyn R

Sue would like minuted that she is delighted with the work that DLP have carried out over the last 3 months at her home. The windows, roofing and rendering has all been super. It has made a big difference to the site bar one block where there is a delay due to leasehold consultation. Sue asked for clarification as to why this block has not been completed. John M explained the leasehold consultation process and that there appears to have been an oversight where this was not done in time. He will ask Lisa Maguire to speak to Sue.

Lisa  
Maguire

The meeting closed at 12:50hrs.