

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE

10:30am Thursday 10th January 19 held in the
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal

Present: Stephen Bolton (Chair)
Paul Athersmith
Sue Layfield
Jim Layfield
Dorothy Dixon
Charles Howarth
June Peckston

Guests N/A

Staff in attendance: Lyn Richardson - Community Engagement Officer- Minutes
John Mansergh - Assistant Director (Quality & Performance)
Gordon Sisson - Sheltered Housing Manager (part)
Jamie Chacko - ILO Team Leader (part)
Alison Kinnon - Director of Customers and Communities (part)

Apologies: John Short, Win Sayers, Loraine Birchall, Irene and Robin Cooper

Circulation: As above

ACTION

- 1. Minutes of previous Meeting** (22nd November 19)
Agreed as a true record.

- 2. Matters arising**

Lisa Maguire has looked into Mental Health training and the date is 26th February, any member of Tenants' Committee are invited to attend.

The STAR survey is tabled as an agenda item and will be discussed later.

Charles explained that he had spoken to Lisa Maguire regarding the wording of the asbestos letter he recently received and now understood why it was done in that manner, which is aimed at improving access.

- 3. Independent Living Service**

The Board have approved the request for delivering Extra Care services at Edgecombe Court, Kendal and Fell Close/Ellerside, Ulverston. The County has a capital grant fund to support getting schemes up to their Extra Care standard and SLH have been invited to submit a bid to carry out the necessary remedial works and upgrades to both schemes, this bid will be around £50,000.

The Board approved the proposal for the Health Trust to operate 'step up, step down' at Edgecombe Court. These are short stay beds within an Extra Care housing scheme aimed at reducing unnecessary admissions or stays in hospital. The Health Trust would sign a minimum of a 12-month licence to occupy or be responsible for the monthly rent, amenity charge and all associated costs.

Gordon Sisson highlighted that the Government announced that Housing Benefit will continue to meet residents rent payments in all supported housing, including sheltered and Extra Care.

The report discusses the future of sheltered housing and provides the Board with an overview of demand for our sheltered schemes. Whilst lack of demand is still a threat to some schemes, so long as each individual scheme continues to pay for itself and remains viable, it should continue to operate as sheltered housing.

The Independent Living Officers (ILO's), who have for almost two years been delivering the sheltered service from the HUB's, have settled into their changed roles well. The ILO Team Leader has assessed the strengths of each member and allocated specific tasks to those who are more skilled e.g. one officer is has been allocated for tenancy support, so she can spend more time with those residents that require it to maintain their tenancy.

Stephen Bolton asked on behalf of an email that John Short had sent to him. What will happen to existing residents who do not need Extra Care and how will the flats be found and furnished? It was explained that it does not affect existing tenancies. SLH is currently helping CCC to establish the numbers of residents at schemes who are currently in receipt of domiciliary care and who could potentially be transferred to an onsite Extra Care provider.

Charles asked for clarification about the meaning of 'Extra Care'. Gordon explained that it is about providing more support to tenants to maintain independent living. This also means having domestic and support staff onsite who can be called. He advised that it is not about nursing care such as giving medication etc. It will replicate the Birthwaite model where two carers are permanently onsite.

Stephen asked on behalf of John Short if the Extra Care comes about will the schemes no longer be Sheltered Housing? It was confirmed that they always remain as sheltered schemes but with added enhancements.

Jim asked if the Extra Care would be extended to other sheltered schemes. Gordon explained that other schemes would not be considered as it has been shown that there is high demand for Ulverston and Kendal Town Centres.

Sue asked if Yewbarrow had been considered but Gordon explained that it is based on a point system and it had scored significantly less than the minimum number required to be considered by the County Council.

There is no financial risk to SLH as the Health Trust will be responsible for the rent and amenity charge. There have never been any problems at Birthwaite where this had been running for 10 years.

Stephen read out a comment on behalf of John Short. This report includes the statement '*an improved service to the sheltered tenants*' but there is still some anger and resentment as many schemes at the withdrawal of scheme managers and resultant reduced services. Jamie Chacko explained that one of the schemes asked for a meeting with her and Gordon to ask for a scheme manager back. She asked the tenants to prepare before the meeting to think about what services they were no longer getting compared to before. When the meeting took place, there was only one minor comment about what they missed by not having a scheme manager available.

In 2025 the analogue phone lines will be switched off and all schemes need to be replaced with a digital service. Gordon will bring a separate report to the Committee about this issue in March.

Gordon

4. Draft Tenancy Fraud Policy

Alison Kinnon asked the Committee to review the draft Tenancy Fraud Policy which is a new policy. The policy is about providing an effective Housing management service, ensuring properties are not wholly sub-let to unauthorised tenants or they've been abandoned. If we don't know who our tenants are we jeopardise our ability to respond effectively to reports of ASB, repair issues and general neighbourhood sustainability. She added that Social Housing is a public asset and as the housing provider it is our responsibility to ensure it is used appropriately.

It is also about safeguarding the public purse as properties used fraudulently are not available to those in genuine need. This has a knock-on effect in that homeless families are being placed in temporary accommodation whilst they wait for an appropriate home to become available.

The National Fraud Authority (NFA) has identified tenancy fraud as the largest area of fraud loss across local government.

Section 2 of the draft policy lists the relevant legislation including the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 which came into force in October 2013, providing new powers to investigate and prosecute cases of tenancy fraud.

Examples of social housing fraud include: unlawful subletting, key selling and Right to Buy fraud.

The last section of the policy outlines SLH approach to preventing and enforcing fraud. To prevent fraud SLH takes photographs of all new tenants at sign up, works with the local authority, ask for statements to read and signed, ask for ID to be brought to the accompanied viewing and sign up, record applicants and tenants National Insurance number and interview Right to Buy or Right to acquire applicants.

To ensure effective enforcement staff have been provided with training, annual tenant audits, investigate 100% of fraud cases reported, commence investigations within seven working days and log and record actions on housing management system.

The Senior Management Team will receive an annual report on Tenancy Fraud which will show how performance is monitored.

The policy will be reviewed by the Board in 2022, or where there have been significant changes to regulation or legislation to warrant a further policy review.

Alison outlined a few recent SLH cases involving attempts to complete the RTB process fraudulently. Following investigation and enforcement action, two tenancies have ended (legal action has been taken since) and a further case is at court stage.

There was a discussion around Right to Buy when relatives or friends are trying to purchase the property. Alison explained that they would follow the policy in this situation and complete a rigorous financial assessment as part of the application process. If funds were not the tenants, then it would be investigated as fraudulent.

5. In-Depth Assessment (IDA) Update

John Mansergh updated the Committee on the progress with the Regulator of Social Housing's In-Depth Assessment (IDA) process. They will be onsite on 23rd January to interview the Executive Management Team and, separately, the Board & Audit

Chairs. The assessors will be back to observe the Board meeting on the 14th February.

John has previously presented to Tenants Committee regarding the process of an In-Depth Assessment, who is primarily concerned with the Governance and Financial Viability of South Lakes Housing. Currently SLH is graded as G1 and V1 which is the highest level. Currently they are not looking at Tenant services but in light of the recent Green Paper there may be a change of focus in the future.

The Regulator has already received a number of documents (60 in total) from SLH, which was their requirement before the 31st December. Some examples of documents sent include; the Business Strategy, Internal and external Audits and financial reports.

The outcome is expected around the 1st week in April. If SLH stays at the same level, there will be no report but if it is downgraded then there is a published report.

6. Home Standard

John Mansergh presented the paper on behalf of the Asset Manager who was unable to attend. He advised that the document, requested by the Committee, contains the written detail relating to the discussion held at the last meeting. He advised that the revised SLH Home Standard replaces the Offer Document and sets the standards for repairs and maintenance going forward (subject to Board consideration in February).

The document includes standards around Asbestos Management, Fire Risk Assessments, annual Gas safety checks, periodic electrical check (every 5 years or at change of a tenancy), mains powered smoke Detectors and Fire Alarm systems.

The cyclical kitchen programme is going to be increased from 15 years to 20 years which is an increase in 5 years. The estimated saving will be £9 million over the 30-year financial plan. The Board are looking at reprioritising this money for environmental works such as poor fencing and external render. This change was supported by the Tenants' Committee at the last meeting and priorities shaped by the Tenant Scrutiny Review. Tenants' Committee confirmed again that they were supportive of the changes to kitchen replacements in favour of reinvesting into these other priorities.

Elaine G

Jim asked around the SLH standard on bathrooms and replacing bath, wash basin and toilet every 40 years. How does SLH know the future need as he has recently read a report that matched socio groups with types of bathrooms required which concluded that the modern day preference is for a shower. John thanked Jim for his input and advised that he would report back to the Asset Manager and request some flexibility. Charles added that Lifetime Homes Standard should also be considered.

Elaine G

There was some confusion regarding the wording of external painting as it mentions 'if adjoining privately owned properties have been externally painted but an SLH property has not, we will consider adding this into the cyclical painting programme'. John Mansergh thought that this related to painting of external walls (render) rather than the painting of woodwork. He will check with Elaine.

John M

Dorothy also queried if doors are made to order or bought in bulk as her front door has a spy hole that is really high. John advised that they were 'made to measure' but that it was likely that this didn't include spy holes. Again, he will check with Elaine.

John M

Sue asked if outside steps to homes are inspected under footpath inspections. John explained that there will be an additional £5m in the next 5-year plan around infrastructure to addresses these kind of issues. He will make sure that this is covered in the next edition of the standard.

Elaine G

Jim added that the document on page 2 needs to be amended from 'Homes and Communities Agency' to 'The Regulator of Social Housing'.

7. STAR Survey report

John Mansergh presented the report, following on from the Committee's last meeting which considered a summary report. As reported at the last meeting, the STAR survey shows that most areas have improved. However, there are 3 areas of lower satisfaction; SLH listens to your views and acts upon them, SLH gives you the opportunity to make your views known and the final outcome of your query. These areas will be focused on within the resultant action plan.

Dorothy referred to the 'preferred communication style' where 71% prefer to use the telephone. Dorothy asked how this would be viewed given the growth in online service delivery. John replied that this observation was not lost on the team and that, whilst providing a really good telephone services was always going to be important, there were other reasons to progress with the digital agenda. He used an example of 13,000 repair calls per annum where a large % could be shifted to online delivery then this would be a better use of resources, allowing the team to focus more on those tenants who most needed it, instead of them waiting for responses. John added that personal/human touch would always be important to SLH.

There was a discussion around how the call is answered by our customer services team and the expectation that the caller will know how to take a photo of the problem that they may be reporting. The assumption is that everyone has a smart phone. It was agreed to talk to customer services team regarding how they phrase the question e.g Are you able to take a photograph of the repair and send it to us?. Lyn to discuss with the Customer Services Team Leader.

Lyn R

8. Estate Management Scrutiny Draft Report

Lyn explained that managers had now commented on the report in the recommendation section. The committee looked through this and agreed that the answers to Recommendations 3 and 7 needs further explanation as the answers were not very clear.

Charles has asked for a further sentence to be added to the summary of findings to clarify that the panel is fully behind all the recommendations.

It was agreed not to report to the February Board meeting until the report was agreed and re-presented to the Tenants' Committee. Charles will present the report to Board when it is ready.

New meeting date set for 24th January 11.00am. Lyn to send out letter confirming venue.

Lyn R

12. Members Reports

Cumbria and North Lancashire Forum – Dorothy explained that the annual fees will be due for the Forum and they are actively looking at encouraging other Housing Associations to join. Castles and Coasts have observed one meeting but have not yet decided if they will join. There are a couple of awareness days planned for the year ahead including Mental Health Awareness.

Complaints Panel - Stephen Bolton has stepped down as chair so there is now a vacancy. It was agreed that the new chair would be selected at the next Complaints

Panel meeting rather than at Tenants Committee. The next meeting is provisionally booked for the 4th April. Lisa to send the invite.

Lisa M

13. AOB

Lyn explained that there is Mental Health Training organised for Tuesday 26th February. The course is over 3 hours and requires a work booklet to be completed which will result in an NCFE Level 1 Award in Mental Health Awareness.

The course is open to both staff and tenants. Charles Howarth, Sue Layfield, June Peckston, John Short (provisional), Stephen Bolton, Dorothy Dixon, John Mansergh and Lyn Richardson have asked to be registered for the course.

Lyn R

The meeting closed at 12:45hrs.