

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE

10:30am Thursday 7th March 19 held in the
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal

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

Irene Cooper (Observing)
Robin Cooper(Observing)

Guests N/A

Staff in attendance: Lyn Richardson - Community Engagement Officer- Minutes
John Mansergh - Assistant Director (Quality & Performance)
Gordon Sisson - Sheltered Housing Manager (part)
Stephen Roe- Head of Housing (part)

Cath Purdy- Chief Executive (Part)

Apologies: John Short and Win Sayers

Circulation: As above

ACTION

1. Minutes of previous Meeting (10th January 19)

Agreed as a true record.

2. Matters arising

All matters related to point 6 on the notes regarding the SLH Home Standard.

There has been clarification that the Board approved, at its February meeting, the estimated £9M saving to be reinvested into environmental works etc.

It was also confirmed that thermostatic showers over baths are fitted as standard to meet all needs. This answered Jim's question regarding socio economic groups and their preferences for showers.

In relation to footpath inspections outside of properties, Elaine confirmed that these are included within the stock condition surveys and repairs can be reported to the Customer Services Team as normal.

John also clarified that the offer to paint private properties (at a cost) relates to render only, not woodwork.

It is also noted that there was confusion over the Mental Health Level 1 training date and over who was invited to attend.

There has also been a discussion with the Customer Service Team to make them aware that not all tenants have smart phones and are able to take pictures of repairs and send them in. There have previously been some comments that it is assumed that tenants have SMART phones and are able to do this.

3. Sheltered update

Gordon explained that there will be changes in 2025 regarding analogue telephone services which will be switched off and replaced with a digital service. This will have a significant impact on services that are delivered as it will affect; the lifeline service, fire detection systems in all twelve schemes.

A specific 'task and finish group' has developed a priority list and a programme of works which will ensure that all twelve schemes are digitally ready by 2025.

Binfold Croft in Kirkby Lonsdale has been identified as the highest priority, it has a total of 48 properties spread across Bifold Croft, Gate Flats, Green Square Flats, Lunefield Gardens and Thirnby Court.

The work will commence shortly and take around 4 weeks to complete. There will be 2 visits to the tenants' home but most works are external so minimum disruption is expected.

The procurement of the system for Bifold Croft has a total value of £61,000 which represents a huge investment in the safety of our tenants and quality of our properties.

The guest room charges at Sheltered schemes have traditionally been set by balancing the commercial value with the social value. The rent has been set at £10 per person per night, plus a one-off cleaning fee of £36 for 1-7 nights. Gordon asked the committee if they are in agreement with the nightly charge changing to £10.55 per person per night plus £36 cleaning charge. Charles posed the question why the rent could not be higher? Gordon did not see why it could not be raised and asked for the committee what they felt was an appropriate amount. After some discussion the conclusion was £15.00 which Gordon will take back for review.

GS

The schemes surgeries were introduced after Tenants' Committee raised concerns over isolation and reduced contact that some people were experiencing. The surgeries were set up to offer housing management support, answer tenancy related issues and signpost to support if needed. They have been running for 2 years in all schemes and have had mixed attendance. There has been no attendance at Brithwaite, Cross Lane, Edgecombe Court, Fell Close, Gallowbarrow and Gladstone House.

Although Independent Living Officers can do Legionella flushes and Fire safety checks, it is not a good use of their time.

It is proposed to cease Brithwaite, Cross Lane, Edgecombe Court, Fell Close, Gallowbarrow and Gladstone. To continue with Bifold Croft and Tyson square (monthly meetings) and to continue but review Mill Dam, Soutergate, Yewbarrow Lodge and West Ing/Drummermire.

A copy of the digital switchover programme will be sent to John Short.

LR

4. Governance Update

As the committee is already aware, SLH have been undergoing an In-Depth Assessment (IDA) by the Regulator of Social Housing. This has involved submitting over 60 documents (strategies, board reports and audit reviews) to the Regulation Team. This was followed by a series of interviews by them with the Executive Team, the chair of the Board and the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee. The final part of the assessment was an observation at the February Board. The Regulators decision will be reported at the end of March. SLH's current ratings on Governance and Viability are G1/V1 (highest gradings).

The February Board approved the setting of Rents and service Charges for 2019/20. This is in keeping with the Rents and Service Charges Policy approved by the Board in November 18, which was subject to Tenants Committee consultation. Rents will continue to be set in line with Government policy and the Regulator of Social Housing's Rent Standard. This includes a 1% rent reduction for the year ahead for the majority of our properties, being the last of a 4-year 1% rent reduction policy. Rents will increase by Consumer Prices Inflation +1% each year from 1st April 2020 for a period of at least 5 years (subject to any change in Government Policy). SLH rents are affordable compared to the market with average monthly rents of £643 although this is skewed to some extent by the Lake District factor.

SLH will continue to charge tenants for additional services based on actual costs of the services provided. Sheltered amenity charges for individual schemes will continue to be set at levels that match estimated costs for the coming year adjusted by an amount overcharged or undercharged on the actual costs for the last full financial year. There was a discussion around Sheltered Housing not being a 100% funded service by its rents and that there is a need for charges to be more accurate.

The Budget has been approved for the budget 2019/20. This reflects decisions taken on Rent setting (1% reduction), Employee Pay, and Pension settlement (£214k increase), the Investment Programme (4.6m) and the Repairs and Maintenance (3.3M). The latter includes significant increases in Health and safety compliance including; radon testing (50k), fire risk maintenance (150k) and asbestos removal (£120k). All loan covenants have been met with the projected loan drawdown is £2m in the last quarter 2019/2020. This will increase the loan balance to £33m from the current £31 level, which is within the £40m loan facility.

There has been a slight decrease for the Tenant Involvement budget but this reflects a realignment of budgets around 'actual spend', as opposed to a 'real' cut. The £8,000 reduction will not prevent the committee from doing anything. The GAP budget has risen from £10,000 to £15,000 which resolves a previous misunderstanding in last year's budget.

The Board approved the new Home Standard which was subject to Tenants Committee and Tenants Scrutiny consultation. The main change being the kitchen lifecycle change from 15 to 20 years which will generate £9M of savings (across the 30-year financial plan).

SLH and SLDC have prosecuted a man for sub-letting a property last month - this is the first prosecution of its kind in the district under the Social Fraud Act 2013.

There is currently a review of all policies and strategies to ensure they are up to date and align with best practice. This also means that policies will be more tenant friendly and subject to regular review.

The Committee thanked John for the update.

5. Rent Statement

Stephen Roe presented plans to make the postal rent statements an opt-in service only and My Account will become the default method to access transactions. The current system means that Rent statements are 3 weeks behind but with My Account rent transactions will be updated within 24 hours. The feedback from both staff and tenants has been that the paper statements have led to confusion as the data is delayed. The last postal rent statement will be sent out mid-April.

My Account was launched in July 2018, with 10% of tenants now signed up and 45% of users check their balance every month.

The process on becoming a My Account user can be quite fiddly (a potential barrier to using the system) but improvements are on the way.

The proposed changes will be communicated through the annual rent review letter in February and through targeted campaigns with text messages. For those that choose to opt in there will be alerts in place to help us identify them every 6 months. The income team will work with those that are most vulnerable in terms of their financial management to ensure we are aware of the changes.

Charles and Paul both asked when the annual rent letters had been sent as these have not been received, Steve said that he would chase this up. All other tenants' committee members have received their statements.

SR

6. Estate Management Scrutiny Draft Report

Lyn went over the changes that had been made to the Estate Scrutiny report and Tenants' Committee are happy with the recommendations going to Board.

Charles pointed out that under Part 4; Next steps, that the top paragraph needs to be changed to now reflect that the 2 managers had presented an answer to the 2 recommendations which were queried.

LR

Charles will present the report to Board on behalf of the Scrutiny panel in May.

CH

7. Quarter 3 Performance report

This quarter covers the up until the end of December 2018.

The percentage of current rent and arrears collected is good at the moment. There are 210 tenants on Universal Credit and there is a National slow-down on the migration of the service. Currently the change is only taking place if there is a change in someone's circumstances. There is now the change from 48 weeks to 52 weeks (ending rent free weeks) which will help with collection rates.

The overall rent loss through voids has increased this is partly due to the higher voids standard which has improved customer satisfaction and reduced complaints. The target also reflects the challenges in sheltered housing stock where there is some low demand in a couple of schemes.

The number of self-service transactions is at 40% which has led to a decrease in telephone calls (9%).

The number of jobs completed within target time has reduced and work is still required to improve van stock and material supply. There has also been the change to a new depo and ensuring that it had all the right resources. The partnership with Wolseley should ensure that materials get out to the trades staff quickly. Loraine

asked that the supporting commentary reflect this rather than the current 'management speak' which is in the report.

JM

We are currently at the same level of houses that we had at transfer (3,156). There is also a slow down on the number of RTB with only 11 sales against the forecasted 14-15.

The Independent Living Service is currently below target with only 3 clients to date. The service is going to be reviewed at the May Board meeting to review progress. The service has been widely advertised through Integrated Care Community groups, stands at the 3 local hospitals, through local libraries and Age UK groups.

Charles asked under measure 3 what the extra £15k was being spent on? John explained that all repairs are now being done before it is being relet but kitchens and bathrooms are done in the normal cycle.

Charles asked about van stock and John explained that vans should be kitted out with 80% of the stock that is required to complete most repairs.

Measure 23 grammatical error 'based upon three clients, who are **both**. Change to **all**.

JM

There has been a significant reduction in the average days sickness and the Committee would like to thank Alistair and Sue in achieving this.

LR

8. Tenancy Standard Scrutiny Review

The next standard to review is the Tenancy Standard, this involves; allocations and mutual exchanges, tenancy management policies, tenancy agreements and the different types of tenancies used.

The dates for the panel are; 25th April, 16th May and 13th June. All meetings are 10.30am till 12.30pm in Windermere room.

LR

Charles Howarth, June Peckston and Paul Athersmith would like to be panel members. Dorothy does not want to attend meetings but is happy to comment on any documents that are shared.

Jim Layfield is happy to be a reserve if anyone drops out.

12. National Housing Federation Draft Plan' Together with Tenants' Presentation

The National Housing Federation is the membership body for Housing Associations in England. They have produced a draft plan '*Together with Tenants*' which explains the changes that housing associations are considering with the aim of making a stronger, more balanced relationship with tenants.

Under the plan there are 4 proposed actions:

1. A new requirement in the National Housing Federation Code of Governance for boards to be accountable to their tenants and residents.
2. A new Together with tenants Charter setting out what tenants and residents can expect from their housing association landlord.
3. Tenant and resident oversight and scrutiny of the charter, with a report on how their landlord is doing against the charter commitments.
4. A closer link with regulation.

The Charter will have 8 commitments including examples such as; Every tenant and resident has the right to be treated with respect. Every tenant and resident has the right to a decent, safe home and quality service.

John then went through the online questionnaire which the Tenants' Committee completed. Tenants' Committee members did not feel that commitment 7 was achievable, it reads '*Every tenant and resident will receive support and advice when things go wrong or their expectations aren't met*'. The committee feels that SLH cannot always meet expectations and would prefer it to read '*Every tenant and resident will receive reasonable support and advice when things go wrong or their expectations aren't met*'. The Committee added that tenant's needs should be met, but expectations cannot always be met.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny would like to get a group together to create a national panel. Charles would like to put himself forward for this and John will work with him to put his application together.

CH/JM

There was a discussion around a National Panel and the feeling in the room was that there should be Regional panels with representation from both Urban and rural settings, which then then feed into the National Panel.

40 Housing Associations have already signed up but there was not a feeling that SLH needs to rush to 'sign up' as tenants feel that a lot of the Charter is already being met by current tenant involvement activities. John added that the timing of this agenda was useful for SLH as it is reviewing the Tenant Involvement Policy later in the year. It was last reviewed in December 2016.

John explained that he will report back to the Committee when the consultation is completed. This is expected to be in September.

13. Members' Reports

Cumbria and North Lancashire Forum – The forum met at Morecambe Town Hall and discussed the subject for the next awareness day. The focus will be on Mental Health Awareness with it covering; what is mental health illness, what are the different conditions, what agencies are available for support and what do Housing Associations do around Mental Health.

Complaints Panel - There is a Tenant Complaint Panel next week, in which the tenant who has made the complaint will be attending. Charles, Dorothy, John Short and Paul will be attending. The complaint has already been investigated by the Director but the tenant would now like it to be heard by the panel.

14. AOB

There was no Any Other Business.

The meeting closed at 12:40hrs