

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE

10:30am Thursday 11th July 19 held in the
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal

Present: Stephen Bolton (Chair)
Loraine Birchall (Vice Chair)
Sue Layfield
Jim Layfield
Dorothy Dixon
Charles Howarth
June Peckston
John Short
Win Sayers

Guests Mr Withers (observer)

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

Apologies: Paul Athersmith

Circulation: As above

ACTION

1. Minutes of previous Meeting (9th May 19)

Agreed as a true record.

Minutes to go on the SLH website.

JM

2. Matters arising

2 grammar errors in minutes

LR

List of dates for estate walkabouts

LR

3. Governance update

Charles presented the latest Tenant Scrutiny Review (Neighbourhood & Community Standard) report to the Board meeting in May. The item was first on the agenda and it got a good airing – all of the recommendations were accepted. The Board agreed to closely monitor the progress of your recommendations to see if they are being actioned by managers – the Audit & Risk Committee will be looking at this every quarter, starting at their next meeting on 30th July.

Charles added that it was good to be first on the agenda as it saved waiting around and meant that they had time to listen.

The Board is updating its Business Strategy for the next 5 years. This will be finalised at the Board meeting in August. 4 new objectives proposed are as follows;

1. Ensure good quality neighbourhoods and enable thriving communities where people choose to live
2. Provide safe, energy efficient and good quality homes
3. Increase the number of SLH homes either through acquisition or new build – around 50 per year
4. Transform the business through digital and flexible ways of working and ensure an effective and efficient business

The strategy is still being worked on by Cath ready for the next Board meeting.

The committee endorsed the new objectives but asked that particular emphasis be placed on providing safe and energy efficient homes.

Fiona H/
Ian M

Dorothy raised the issue around the increased investment in Waterside which looks good, but there is now a grounds maintenance issue around weeds and paths.

Dorothy also asked about the cost of doing a new building versus acquiring properties. John M advised that it tends to be cheaper but there is less control over specification and standards.

Relating to objective 2, Sue L raised the issue around the safety of steps outside their flat and that they are slippery and dangerous. This has been raised several times before but there does not seem to be a clear answer.

EG/LM

Charles also used the example of a path which is not safe and a stone wall.

EG

Lorraine mentioned that SLDC is going down the enforcement route regarding walls being mended and highlighted a recent example of a wall located next to a school.

The Board has approved its latest 30-year financial plan. This includes borrowings of £40M with M&G and RBS - £10M undrawn – additional 52% of stock uncharged (gearing levels at 27%, median is 44%) so lots of capacity to borrow more should the Board require it.

Key points;

- Rents will revert to CPI+1% from 2020-25
- Annual budgets for responsive repairs c£1.6M
- £13M for decent homes standard works every 5 years
- £1M every 5 years for asbestos and structural works
- £20M for new development over the next 3 years (151 units)
- Assumes 20 Right to Buy sales every year
- Assumes more people will struggle to pay rent following increase in Universal Credit claimants

SLH is also working with SLDC to finalise a further loan for new development - £6M initially (up to £15M). Cheaper than bank finance.

Overall – robust plan, can afford to keep investing in current stock and new supply, lots of stress testing so can weather most storms. Externally validated and V1 rating by Regulator should give you assurance that SLH is financially sound.

Charles asked why the £10m had not been drawn down yet and are we paying for it? John explained that it will be used and that it is for unplanned development so if a developer approached SLH with 50 units we would have the capacity to make an offer.

The Board approved a number of new development schemes at its meeting in May – total of 84 new homes.

The Chair and CEO met with the Regulator following the IDA and reported no major issues of concern but referred to SLH as an 'outlier' in terms of new development

The Chair has completed appraisals of all Board members.

The Board have agreed for the Development Panel to become a fully-fledged Committee with delegated authority, this was due to the feeling that there is lots happening in development which requires a Committee to review more closely. Loraine is on this committee.

Stephen has become a member of the Audit & Risk Committee.

Finally the SLH AGM will be held at 5pm on 19th September and will be open to current shareholders only. At the AGM Peter Kuit will step down as a Board member who (along with John Holmes) is the longest serving Board member and joined the Board in 2011 (prior to SLH becoming a Housing Association).

SLH has won a tender to provide management and maintenance services to Lune Valley Rural Housing Association. The contract is due to start in October 2019 – SLH will be undertaking repairs, major works & cyclical maintenance, allocating properties, managing their tenancies, collecting rents, running their bank account & treasury arrangements, as well as providing support to their Board. Lune Valley has around 90 homes in the Craven, Lancaster and Wyre local authorities and the new work continues SLH's strategy to reach beyond our traditional boundaries.

John talked briefly around the fire in May at Deardon close. The property was part of a mid-terrace of bungalows with the property now uninhabitable. The properties to either side have been temporarily decanted due to damage to the roofs. SLH is currently working with insurers to put a specification out for works which is likely to take some months.

There will be a Hoarder Awareness session at the next Board meeting which will focus on SLH strategic response to hoarding and multi-agency work.

4. Business Transformation and Digital Strategy

Steve Roe presented the strategy which focuses on radically transforming our people, processes and systems of work over the next 3 years. It details where SLH is currently at and how the business will look in 2022. This will involve a major culture change from some departments but one that will not be negotiable

Loraine asked under 4.1 Flexible working culture, if the 'Ideas Lab' would be linked to a reward system. Steve explained that the ideas lab would be a physical area and there would be an online forum where ideas could be shared. There will also be a set agenda item on team meetings to make sure that everyone is involved.

Loraine also asked if staff have been part of this process rather than a top down approach. Steve explained that staff had been involved at Chief Executive briefings and that staff would be involved on the ground with stress testing of the IT system.

Charles asked under 2.1 what LEAP OD meant? Staff will know what this is but it stands for Leading, Engaging, Adapting and Performing (LEAP) – which is part of SLH's Organisation Development (OD) programme.

Charles also mentioned about the role of Chat Bots and Paul Aitken will be asked to a Tenants Committee meeting to explain how they work.

Paul A

Steve explained that since the introduction of My Account calls to customer services had dropped from 39,000 to 30,000 per year as more transactions are done on line.

There will also be the opportunity that in the future there will initially be an automated response directing tenants to My Account before the call is answered.

This led to a discussion around how impersonal this is and that it is not good customer service. Mr Withers said that tenants need to take this on board as his generation are inclined not to get involved. He suggested training sessions could be rolled out to help those who are not as IT savvy.

Charles suggested SLDC could help with this as they offer training and courses as well as Age UK. Lorraine mentioned that there may be funding available from the Crime and commissioner for on line safety courses.

Win was impressed that SLH was looking at a more flexible way of working such as hot desking and working from home.

5. Tenancy Standard Scrutiny Report

Lyn gave an overview of the Tenancy Standard and drew attention to the main issues that came out of the meetings. These issues have formed 8 recommendations and managers have commented alongside how this will be achieved.

In relation to mutual exchanges the group were concerned with the bond that a tenant pays to SLH and how this is then paid back. Alongside how can SLH better promote the Homeswapper service to tenants who want to use this service.

The group felt that some policies relating to tenure need to be updated and communicated to tenants in a clearer manner whether this is at the point of sign up or through the SLH website.

The group did feel that there are many avenues of support for potential tenants to gain help in completing the Choice based lettings form. This includes when appropriate meeting face to face but also linking up with partner agencies.

These issues have formed 8 recommendations and managers have commented alongside how this will be achieved.

The report was fully supported by the committee and Paul Athersmith (who is chair for this report) will present it at the next Board meeting in September.

6. Value for Money

There is a Regulatory requirement to incorporate an 'annual publication of value for money evidence' within the accounts. John presented an extract from the draft accounts which will be going to Audit and Risk Committee on 30th July, Board on 13th August and AGM on 19th September.

There were no questions from tenants regarding the document.

7. Tenant Complaint

John explained that the complainant had asked for his complaint to be heard by the Tenants' Committee. This is not the SLH procedure and the internal complaints procedure needs to be exhausted first before matters are considered by the Tenant Complaint panel.

There was some discussion around the content of the complaint and how this was responded to in terms of the Directors response. It felt that everything was answered fully but the issue around the new bathroom installation by the contractor. John

explained some of the performance issues with the contractor. They no longer do internal works. The committee felt that this point needed to be addressed.

One Committee member was concerned about the timeline of the complaint as he felt that some of the issues raised were years old.

The Committee agreed to monitor the performance of the repairs service more closely.

A response from the Tenants' Committee to be given to the complainant.

John M

8. Together with Tenants update

John gave an update to the National Housing Federation's initiative to strengthen the voice of tenants. The initial consultation document had been shaped by the previous consultation and a revised Charter will be available at the end of July. This will be considered and tested by the Tenants' Committee at the next meeting.

John M

9. Members Reports/Meeting Update

Cumbria and North Lancashire Forum – Dorothy reported that the mental Health Awareness day on Wednesday 19th June at the Coronation Hall, had been well attended. 30 participants including staff and tenants looked at types of Mental ill health and what support is available.

Annual report working group – Stephen, June and Charles agreed to be on the group. The dates will be in Windermere Suite 23rd Aug and 29th Aug 10.30am-12.30pm.

LR

9. AOB

A new Communications Officer (Emily Graveson) will be starting on 23rd July. One of her first tasks will be working with the Annual Report group.

Charles explained about Action Fraud and current scams that are taking place.

Win Sayers would like to acknowledge that Bell Group have done an excellent job in terms of painting, repairing wood work and cleaning guttering.

LR

Stephen referred to the forthcoming AGM and asked for people to consider the positions of Vice chair and nominations for GAP, complaints panel and Cumbria and North Lancashire Forum in preparation for the AGM in September. Tenants' Committee members to let Stephen know if they are interested.

The meeting closed at 12:50hrs