

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES

10:30am Thursday 14th November 19 held in the
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal

Present: Stephen Bolton (Chair)
Charles Howarth
Sue Layfield
Jim Layfield
John Short
Dorothy Dixon
Lorraine Birchall
Paul Athersmith
John Withers

Guests N/A

Staff in attendance: John Mansergh – Director of Business Assurance
Lyn Richardson- Community Engagement officer
Cath Purdy- Chief Executive (Part)
Rosie Chambers- Customer Services Manager (Part)
Stephen Roe- Head of Housing (Part)
Paul Aitken- IT Manager

Apologies: June Peckston, Win Sayers,

Circulation: As above

ACTION

1. Minutes of previous meetings (12th September 2019)

Agreed as a true record.

AGM minutes approved as a true record.

2. Matters arising

John M looked into rumours about contractors not being paid and has spoken to Richard Hayes regarding this. The issue seems to be resolved through normal meetings and contracting provisions which details that the main contractor should pay the sub contractor.

John M

John Withers informed the group that he got a rebate from United Utilities at Drummermire, as there is a 'soak away' rather than mains sewage. Lyn to speak to Jo-Anne Freeman regarding informing other tenants.

Lyn R

3. Board Update and Business Strategy

Peter Kuit stepped down and John Burt replaced him. John Burt was appointed onto the Development Committee and takes the role of Chair, he has a background in development which will be of great benefit to this committee.
There was an update on Yewbarrow Lodge and tenants are ready to move on.

The Board are due to review its own effectiveness under its Annual internal review, with a focus this year on its own appraisal system. The Board reviews its effectiveness internally every year and externally every 2 years.

Dorothy asked about the recent article in the Westmorland Gazette regarding the High Sparrowmire development. John explained that SLH is planning 24 affordable homes but there are currently some issues around flooding. The planning permission has been deferred as the attenuation storage basin has been rejected, although the housing still has the go ahead.

United Utilities have wider plans for this area, but it is not clear if that is in the next 5-10 years which is not helpful when trying to enable the scheme to come to fruition.

There is a new 5 year Business Strategy which will be presented to staff at the LEAP training day on 22nd November at Brathay Hall.

The strategy focuses on key themes which have been partly led by Government through Policy and Regulation. There are key drivers that have developed the plan including the Climate Change Emergency and Grenfell tower disaster.

The 1st strand is '**Greener**' reflects on our homes and the damage that they cause to the environment. We need to have homes that are more energy efficient with the result that it should make it cheaper for our tenants. This means looking at the EPC of our properties so that we can measure where we are at and how they can be improved.

The 2nd strand is around '**growth**' which looks at our systems and how we can make the processes better. It also looks at how we can increase the number of homes we build with the aspiration of 500 in the next 5 years.

The last strand '**transforming**' identifies different types of technology and how we can use it to make the customer experience better.

The Board are clear about why SLH is here, which is providing 'quality homes and a platform for life'

Relating to 'greener' energy Paul has had an EPC survey carried out and wondered when and where the results will be published.

Tenants asked if Emily (Communications Officer) could post some energy saving tips on Facebook. Lyn R

Cath explained that the proposed roll out of the strategy will be March.

4. **Rent and Service Charges 2020/2021**

In October 2017, the government announced its intention to set a long-term rent deal which would permit annual rent increases on both social rent and affordable rent properties, of up to CPI (at September of the previous year) plus 1% from 2020, for a period of at least five years ('the new policy'). CPI in September 2019 was 1.7% and if the Board chooses the maximum increase of +1%, rents would increase by 2.7% from April 2020.

The last 4 years have been dictated by the Welfare Reform & Work Act with rents having to be reduced by 1% year each year which has resulted in less income to do what we want to do. The new rent policy which comes into effect in April 2020 gives Boards ability to increase rents by a maximum of CPI(Inflation) rate + 1% from April 2020. Taking into account current rents, the Local Housing Allowance Rates and what other Housing providers are charging, the Board have approved a 2.7% increase with absolute approval at the Feb Board meeting.

The Board also discussed rent regarding VOID properties and will use a formula to put rents to formula rent at re-let. New rules mean that SLH can put rents higher but the Board have taken the decision not to do this at this time. They want to look further

into the implications of increasing by 5% for general needs, for example, if rent is £100 it can be put up to £105. The new rules for sheltered means these rents can be increased by 10% but the Board are not considering this.

There was a discussion around the increase and how that might affect properties next to each other and whether Housing Benefit would cover the additional cost. Cath commented that the rents that SLH charge are still below some other Housing Associations and still wants rents to be reasonable.

Some other changes include a small increase to sheltered guest room charges. John Short comment that there needs to be care when increasing the charges as currently it is £36 for the cleaning and £20 per person so that is £56 per night. However, at a previous meeting it was agreed that the guest rooms need to pay for themselves.

The garages will be reviewed by the demand for the block and the condition. If they are in poor demand and condition, then there will not be an increase in rent. Issue raised around rent arrears for garages and why these are not being addressed.

Lyn R

5. Director of Customers Reports

The Customer services report highlights another successful year, surpassing our Key Performance Indicator (KPI) to achieve 40% of digital 'self-serve' transactions, by achieving 41%.

The highly anticipated customer portal known as 'My Account' was launched in June 2018, with services now able to be accessed 24/7. Tenants who are signed up can now view their rent account, contact details, tenancy information and property information.

The CST have also taken on additional administrative tasks from the Assets and Investment Directorate during 2019/20.

Lyn R

It was suggested that it might be useful to hold some workshops on how to use 'My Account, Lyn and Emily to look into this.

Emily G

The Tenancy Management Team have increased in capacity to 3.5 tenancy officers supported by the Tenancy Manager.

A tenant scrutiny review of Neighbourhood and Community Standard was carried out in the Autumn 2018, with several recommendations made to the Board.

The Noise App was launched in July 2017 which enabled 935 recordings to be submitted in connection with 22 ASB noise nuisance cases during 2018/2019. The evidence secured through the Noise App resulted in one ASB eviction and one ASB injunction.

The team have also carried out a Summer Estate Walkabout Programme and this is again planned next year in conjunction with consulting with Tenants Committee.

The Housing Options Team is a member of the Choice based Lettings partnership. In the period 2018-2019 SLH had 3,134 applicants registered out of the total number 13, 817. Whilst the distribution of all applicants in each band is expected, with a small number only in Band A and the majority in Band D+, it is notable that the number of applicants in high need bands (A&B) has increased from 3.6% of the total to 5.3% of in the last 2 years. SLH has one of the highest on-line applications by social landlords at 92%.

Whilst the overall numbers of vacancies have remained stable, the number of sheltered vacancies remains high at 26% of total vacancies.

The Income Management Team have faced challenging times as expected the roll-out of Full Service Universal Credit has adversely impacted on the arrears. The natural migration to UC will continue until 2023, when arrears are expected to peak,

with an anticipated plateau then start to reduce by 2025/26. The team have supported 122 tenants with the move from 'live' service to 'Full' service. The total tenant arrears stands at £282,858 with 28% attributed to UC, this is a 17% increase from the previous year.

6. **Together with Tenants and the Big Conversation**

The Loomio platform for Together with Tenants is still running and is currently focusing on how Associations are implementing the Charter. This includes how it is being shared with staff and also with Tenants.

SLH will be sending a survey around Tenant Involvement in early January to all tenants. It is called the Big Conversation and a small working group of tenants have looked at the survey and made comments. This was very useful to make sure that we get a good response and understand what tenants want.

7. **Welfare Reform Report**

The report gives Board members assurance that SLH are actively managing the latest round of Welfare Reforms and to report the current position in relation to universal Credit.

At Q2 2019/20 the current number of SLH UC claimants stands at 354 (12% of tenants). This increased from 122(4%) over the past 12 months.

The DWP plans to migrate all working-age benefit claimants (including those receiving tax credits) on to UC by Dec 23. This means a further 3.9m of our total income will migrate from Housing Benefit to UC over the next 4 years and therefore this money will no longer be paid directly to SLH.

SLH rents arrears performance has changed from 2.1% at Q2 18/19 to 2.4% at Q2 19/20, this indicates that UC is starting to have an impact in rent arrears.

It is projected that SLHs UC cases will increase from 354 to 615 (20% of tenants) over the next 12 months.

John Short queried around 70% of tenancies being general needs and 14% being sheltered accommodation, as that appears not to add up. Stephen R agreed to look into this discrepancy.

Steve R

8. **My Account and chatbot update**

Paul Aitken, IT Manger went over 'My Account' and the different features that it contains including accessing your rent account, on line payment processing and logging repairs. In the future it is hoped that repair appointments online, viewing documents such as gas\electric certificates and tenancy agreement, uploading documentation, assigning tasks to tenants and additional property data such as gas service due date & planned works details.

The definition of a chatbot is a developed program that can have a discussion/conversation with a human. They can ease communication as they are available 24 hours a day, provide instant information and can help with repetitive tasks.

Jim L asked if a reminder could be put onto My Account such as reminders about home insurance.

Charles commented that the Aids and Adaptions refusal letter is now much better.

Lyn R

9. **Tenant Scrutiny Review Consolidated Actions: Progress Tracker**

John went over the scrutiny tracker and identified several areas that were highlighted in amber.

Tenants Committee were pleased with progress on the recommendations and that the work they had been doing through the scrutiny meetings was being actioned.

10. Members' Reports/Meeting update

Cumbria and North Lancashire Forum- Dorothy explained that the last meeting was held at SLH and John M had done a presentation on Together with Tenants. This was helpful to inform tenants attending about how SLH is getting on as early adopter. There was also a discussion about the next awareness day in Lancaster around estate profiling.

11. AOB

Next years meeting dates agreed: 9th January, 5th March, 5th May, 9th July, 10th Sept, 12th Nov 2020

Stephen wanted to thank all those involved in producing the Annual Report, with special thanks to Emily for designing it.

Jo-Anne Freeman is the new Sheltered Housing manager and is due to attend the next TC meeting to update the committee.

The Choice Based Letting service is going through an overhaul with a new policy and IT system being developed. It was suggested to invite Rebecca Boardley or someone else from the team to update Tenants Committee on this. Lyn R

12. Next Meeting – 9th January 2020 10.30am-12.30pm Windermere Suite

The meeting closed at 12.55pm