

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES

10:30am Thursday 9th January 2020 held in the
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal, LA9 4BD

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

Guests N/A

Staff in attendance: John Mansergh – Director of Business Assurance
Emma Wilson - Minutes
Elaine Glennon – Asset Manager (part)
Jo-Anne Freeman – Sheltered Housing Manager (part)
Lisa Maguire - Regeneration Project Co-ordinator (part)

Apologies: Loraine Birchall
Lyn Richardson

Circulation: As above

ACTION

John M introduced Emma to the Committee. He advised that Emma would be providing support to the Committee and tenant scrutiny groups going forward. Lyn, who will still have a relationship with the Committee, will prioritise her time on community engagement activity which was a key part of the new Business Strategy.

1. Minutes of previous meetings (14th November 2019)

Agreed as a true record subject to one amendment.

The Tenants' Committee supported the proposal to increase rents by CPI +1% from 2020 to 25 (in line with the national rent formula) in order to further invest in existing homes and new developments.

LR

2. Matters arising

EPC – Energy Performance Certificates

Elaine advised that EPC certificates can be accessed online by entering any postal address

<https://www.epcregister.com/reportSearchAddressByPostcode.html>

The idea in the future is for SLH EPC Surveys to be put onto Tenants 'My Account'. The Asset Manager and her team are currently working on what is the best way for this information to be communicated.

LEAP

This is the internal organisational development programme (staff training). There is a separate organisation that provides support in the community on energy efficiency.

3. Election outcome – Implications for Housing

The Conservative majority Government will mean that the manifesto commitments will be under close scrutiny. Universal Credit will continue to role out impacting further on income and rents, although there is likely to be some 'softening'. One million homes have been promised over the next 5 years but this will mainly be home ownership. The Spring Statement should see further commitments on the Affordable Housing Programme and a Social Housing White Paper will be coming at some point. There will be a bigger emphasis on safety and building regulations following Grenfell and the inquiry that followed. Brexit on the terms of the trade deal is likely to impact on repairs and development prices in particular.

The Committee acknowledged the challenging environment and the need to press the case for additional investment in social housing in this area.

4. Asbestos Friendly Report

Lisa talked through the draft letters and information within the fact sheet.

John S queried whether every property is to have a survey completed and when would contact be made as he had not received a phone call regarding a survey being completed for his property. Lisa advised that this should be in process and that letters once agreed would be sent out to all tenants.

Charles highlighted some changes needed to be made to the letter, it required some rejigging and rewording to better enable tenants to understand the process of what order things would happen.

John M stated that the reports produced were rather 'technical' and needed to be clearer for tenants to understand. For example, DIY enthusiasts need to be well informed about any asbestos being present in their homes and how best to manage this safely. He added that the codes within the risk assessment needed to be explained before being shared with tenants. Lisa advised that this had been picked up.

Dorothy asked about tile glue as this was highlighted as an issue as it contained asbestos. Over time many people including herself have removed tiles and the glue due to them deteriorating. Lisa advised that this was quite common so additional information was included in the Frequently Asked Questions on this matter. Dorothy added that some tenants have put laminate flooring put down. Lisa advised that this provide a seal.

The Committee agreed the draft letters, subject to the above changes.

5. Aids and Adaptations Policy

Following a Tenant Scrutiny Review, the Aids and Adaptations Policy was highlighted as needing to be reviewed and updated. The policy and areas updated were shared in the meeting by Elaine. The main changes were to consider adaptations in family homes if alternative accommodation is not available and that an adaptations panel will be formed.

Initial feedback in the meeting was positive, the Tenants' Committee liked the fact that consideration will be given to adapting a family home, particularly where people have local ties to the area. Charles added that it was good to see that the policy was now fairer.

Jim asked whether the old policy was in breach of the legal considerations. John M highlighted that the old policy was compliant as an Equality Impact Assessment had been compiled by an external advisor.

Sue asked that Lunefield Gardens should be included in the appendix of sheltered schemes.

Charles shared his knowledge about a team of people from the integrated rapid response service which put adaptations into people's homes before they leave hospital to ensure they are safe when returning home. This could cause issues for SLH tenants if appropriate permission is not sought and there is asbestos present. This is only in urgent or serious cases. SLH would not usually say no as any adaption would improve quality of life however permission should be obtained.

Dorothy asked what the process is for applying for an adaptation and whether a medical opinion was required. Elaine advised that a medical opinion is sought through the Occupational Therapist (OT) and a referral is made to Cumbria County Council then that comes into SLH. Any OT referral will be considered in line with the current policy.

The Committee approved the new policy.

6. Sheltered Update

Jo introduced herself as the new sheltered Housing Manager she joined SLH in October 2019. She has been familiarising herself with the schemes and tenants. Time has been spent shadowing the team and looking at housing stock and other procedural improvements. She added that she will also be looking at communication and that digital is not always the best solution with for this client group.

Jo also gave an update on Yewbarrow Lodge, which is a sensitive situation particularly with the current remaining people. There were currently 16 voids.

John S referred to the decision a few years back to remove scheme managers from each scheme which some tenants still resented. John also added that phone calls are not always followed up particularly when there is a change in staffing. Jo advised that she was looking into communication as the Independent Living Officers (ILO) paths don't always cross and the notes are

being missed on the system. She added that she is aware that there is still work to be done with the ILO set-up and that she would be discussing what changes tenants would like.

Win raised the issue of digital communications and other Committee members commented about the long wait to get through to Customer Services on the telephone. Jo replied that digital was good for some tenants but that she was looking at all communications. John M advised that SLH was trying to manage better incoming calls and direct them to the most appropriate route. He advised that SLH was at the early stages of its digital transformation but accepted the feedback. He added that the forthcoming tenant scrutiny review could look at this area in more depth.

The Committee asked that there should be an earlier option to speak to an advisor, particularly for regular callers.

7. Tenant Involvement Discussion

This is be deferred to the next meeting due to LR being off.

8. Members Reports/ Meeting Update

This took place at the beginning of December. Lancaster City Council provided an overview of the community engagement work to improve the Rylands estate, including coffee mornings, clothing exchange and food bank. They were also fundraising for an open-air gym. John M commented that lessons can be learned for SLH in terms of how they have engaged tenants.

9. Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Scrutiny Review

John M advised that we are seeking volunteers; it has been 3 years since this was last reviewed. Dates and times to be agreed. This will be around 3 meetings over a few weeks. This is required to comply with regulatory standards as well as assessing performance and customer feedback. Questions will be formed at the first session and in the next session managers will be asked how they meet these questions feedback provided will then support the next meeting to find out if actions been followed through and what evidence supports the process.

Charles Howarth, Jim and Sue Layfield, June Peckston, Paul Athersmith, Win Sayers volunteered.

10. AOB

Charles raised concerns about car parking provision for meetings following difficulties this morning. This was also compounded further when he telephone the office and had to wait a long time on the telephone queuing system. John M advised that the car park was particularly busy today and that in future provision will be made available for those with mobility problems. Emma will also circulate staff telephone numbers.

EW

John S asked about the changes to the annual report calendar following comments from a few residents (they start from a Sunday instead of a

Monday). John M advised that the format was changed as the report is now done in-house and that he would feed this into the editorial group for 2020.

11. Next Meeting – March 5th 2020 10:30am-12:30pm Windermere Room.

The meeting closed at 12:30pm