

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES

10am Thursday 5th March 2020 held in the
Windermere Suite, Bridge Mills, Kendal, LA9 4BD

Present: Stephen Bolton (Chair)
Jim Layfield
Lorraine Birchall
John Short
Dorothy Dixon
Paul Athersmith
June Peckston

Guests N/A

Staff in
attendance: Cath Purdy – Chief Executive (part)
John Mansergh – Director of Business Assurance
Emma Wilson- Governance Support Assistant (minutes)
Richard Hayes – Director of Assets (part)
Jo-Anne Freeman – Sheltered Housing Manager (part)
Alison Kinnon – Director of Customers (part)
Lyn Richardson – Community Engagement Officer

Apologies: John Withers, Charles Howarth, Win Sayers, Sue Layfield

Circulation: As above

ACTION

1. Minutes of previous meetings

Minutes of the meeting held on the 9th January 2020 were agreed as a true record.

2. Matters arising

No matters arising from previous minutes.

3. Business Strategy and Board update

- 3.1 Cath presented the Business Strategy and explained that previous feedback obtained from Tenants' Committee Members, employees and Board members had helped to inform the updated Business Strategy and Values. The 'Values' of the organisation are what we expect from our employees. The 'Values' will be embedded within the organisation through training and staff appraisals. The presentation highlighted the themes of; Growing, Greening and Transforming (GGT) and Cath explained how these will be worked towards and achieved. This will be supported by a Business Strategy delivery plan, updated annually.

- 3.2 Dorothy asked about recycling; currently tenants are using the communal bins to dump furniture in on Waterside. Cath asked for this to be noted and be reviewed within the neighbourhood plans.
- 3.3 June asked what kind of homes SLH will be working towards building within the Business Strategy. Cath responded by explaining that some would be 2- and 3-bedroom family homes, bungalows and extra care housing, however SLH need to be sure that there is a need for this. Cath highlighted that growing SLH is not just about building new homes it's about tenant satisfaction, community engagement and taking on additional apprentices.
- 3.4 Paul queried what Passivhaus was and Cath explained this is a design of a carbon neutral house. SLH are currently developing some homes to this standard in Halton. This will be learning for future builds and working towards our Greening theme within the Business Strategy. Paul asked what happens with older windows, Cath responded by explaining there is a cyclical programme in place to upgrade them. SLH have made a commitment to reduce all homes to EPC band rating C by 2025. SLH is committed to reduce carbon emissions but trying to do that on rental income is going to significantly stretch the financial budget.
- 3.5 Jim asked if the National Housing Federation would be putting pressure on Government to raise concerns about funding 'net zero' and the pressures around building and reducing carbon emissions. Cath advised that the Federation is working on lobbying.
- 3.6 Discussion took place around the use of gas and the move to using alternative heat sources such as electric or airtsource. John S commented that lots of SLH properties leak heat through their doors there has been draught excluders fitted in the past, but they don't work very well and probably require additional work to keep heat in.
- 3.7 Stephen and Jim said they felt that the Business Strategy was well produced with good graphics and easy to follow.
- 3.8 John M gave an update following the Board meeting on the 20th February; rents have been reviewed and will be set at CPI + 1%. Employees will receive a pay rise of 2 % plus 2 'privilege' days leave for the Christmas closure of the office. Cath explained that the Board agreed a policy change to Board Members service. The maximum term of service is 9 years but 6 years will become the norm (exceptional circumstances can apply). To ensure Board skills remain fresh after stepping down or retirement Board members will not be able to return to the Board (again, unless there is an exceptional circumstances).

4. Repairs booklet, emergency repairs, out of hours review and fire risk assessments

- 4.1 Richard shared the report: 'Repair & Maintenance service review'. The purpose of the report was to consider several service improvement recommendations to reduce costs and improve customer satisfaction and Value for Money. It was proposed to remove the 'Urgent' repairs classification, and this will generate more appointment slots. As a result of increased capacity, it is proposed that the priority to undertake routine repairs be reduced to 15 working days, thereby reducing the waiting time for customers between repairs ordering and delivery. Tenants would be expected to make safe repairs until SLH can respond to them within normal working hours. This would involve customers turning off gas, water or electrical supplies until an operative can attend via an emergency appointment within 24hrs. The new classification of repairs would be as follows;
- Emergency – attend and make safe within 24hrs
 - Appointable 15 working days (21 calendar days)

- Planned repairs 65 working days (90 calendar days)

There are plans to further inform tenants with self-help videos that will be posted on the SLH website.

- 4.2 Richard shared one of the self-help videos that is currently on the SLH website it showed practical skills on how to unblock a sink. Feedback from the Tenants' Committee Members was positive. Loraine suggested some dialogue at the start of the video to explain what tools or items would be needed before the video starts.
- 4.3 Richard asked for feedback on the repairs and service maintenance handbook that tenants had received in their packs ahead of the meeting. Feedback was positive tenants felt the handbook was easy to follow, excellent graphics and very informative. Loraine asked that under the Landlord responsibilities for paths this be made clearer to explain SLH is responsible for all paths around the property including at the side of the property. This would however exclude paths to sheds of over lawned areas.
- 4.4 Jim asked how the emergency would be dealt with should there be a threat to life, or the tenant was vulnerable or disabled. Richard explained that SLH already hold information on vulnerable and disabled tenants and this would be flagged on the system when the call came through and the repair dealt with accordingly. If there was a threat to life, then the appropriate authorities would be informed, and the Business Continuity plan would be activated in line with internal policies and procedures.
- 4.5 Paul queried the light-fittings in tenant homes as with his own he was unable to get the sealed light unit off. Tenants' Committee Members asked if this was SLH responsibility or their own to change the bulbs. John S commented the bulbs were difficult to purchase and asked about the practicalities of an elderly person changing the light bulb. June suggested asking a neighbour. Richard suggested that this could be something a self-help video could help with. Paul will email Richard some photos so they can discuss and agree a solution going forward. **RH / PA**
- 4.6 John S asked Richard about the recent asbestos survey completed at West Ing he has been informed that he is due to have a new kitchen fitted however this has led to another company also being appointed to complete an asbestos survey. John S asked that this be reviewed as it could be costly and may not be required. John S added that there are also some wall ties that require replacement this repair has been logged some time ago now. **RH**
- 4.7 Richard shared the Fire Risk Assessment that had been sent out to Tenant Committee Members in their packs a head of the meeting. Tenants highlighted that there was a lot of detail in the Risk assessment. Richard explained the risk assessment had been completed by an external company Savills. The level of detail is required to ensure SLH have appropriate measures in place. SLH have uploaded all risk assessments to their website. Tenants can then choose if they wish to review the information and access it or not. Loraine commented that she felt reassured by the level of detail as it shows that SLH are taking appropriate measures. Dorothy commented that the document writing was small, Richard explained that the document can be viewed on SLH website and enlarged when doing so.

5. Rents

- 5.1 Alison presented information on rent setting comparisons with other local Housing Associations and the private rented sector. The comparison clearly demonstrated that SLH rents are the most affordable in South Lakeland. Alison then asked if Tenants' Committee Members agreed with SLH applying a 5% Tolerance to the rent. The 5% Tolerance would only be applied to homes that are empty upon re-letting them and would not apply to current tenants. New builds with a section 106 can also have this level of affordable rent set. The Regulator's Rent Standard would allow SLH to apply

up to 10% however Boards are required to have clear rationale for rent setting and Alison feels that the income generated from the application of 5% is adequate. The additional income would be used to support the Business Strategy themes of Growing, Greening and Transforming to improve services for tenants. Alison asked the Committee members if they were happy with the recommendations made, and as members agreed, this will now be presented to the Board in May.

5.2 Paul queried how many long-term voids SLH currently have, Alison responded by explaining currently none, except from Yewbarrow.

5.3 John S asked how many times the 5% Tolerance could be applied should a property be re-let more than once during a year. Alison explained it could only happen once in a year.

5.4 Jim queried the Government 1% increase in rent and why SLH have not brought their rents in line with other Housing Associations. Alison explained this is due to Government changes to rents. SLH must follow the Government's rent setting guidelines and the Regulator of Social Housing monitors this through annual returns.

5.5 June asked Alison if the 5% increase would be covered by housing benefit and Universal Credit. Alison responded by saying yes it would.

5.6 Tenants' Committee Members were happy with the recommendations made.

5.7 Loraine asked if Tenants' Committee could have a viewing of the new Ulverston Town Hall properties. Alison would be happy for this to be arranged.

6. Sheltered update

6.1 Jo provided an update on the sheltered schemes;

6.2 Independent living Officers (ILO) are now based at SLH head office, this is to improve working relations with all schemes and get the ILO's out and about more at other sites. Coffee mornings are being held to share the information with all sheltered schemes. Initial feedback has been positive with no concerns raised.

6.3 There have been some technical issues with the installation of the assistive technology at Birthwaite, but this is currently being resolved and should be up and running soon. Tenants have been provided with updates on any changes and progress.

6.4 Jo has been visiting all the schemes over the last few months talking to tenants getting feedback on any issues, looking at décor and the general condition of the properties. Improvements are being made and where additional work is required this has been logged with the repairs team.

6.5 Digital access to services is great from some but Jo explained that she is fully aware that this does not suit all tenants, particularly those in the sheltered schemes. Emily (Communication's Officer) and Jo are working with the tenants on preferred means of communication and reviewing what works best for them.

6.6 Jo asked if anyone had any questions. John S stated that he would be happy to meet with Jo to share ideas about Tenant engagement and how this can be improved. Jo responded by saying she would be more than happy to arrange something after the meeting closes today.

7. AOB

- 7.1 Mr Withers had emailed concerns regarding the current coronavirus situation. John M updated Committee members on actions that SLH are putting in place. A project team has been established and a group of managers will meet weekly. SLH website contains the latest Government guidance on hand washing etc. John M advised that the situation is currently 'business as usual' but that Business Continuity Plans had been recently updated. He advised that additional information would be going out to sheltered schemes. He also advised that, should the situation worsen, that normal business would be changed. This could for example mean; staff working from home and reducing face-to-face meetings. This could equally apply to sheltered schemes to reduce communal contacts. He also advised that repairs could be delayed if there is a risk of staff infection.
- 7.2 Loraine queried have staff got laptops to work remotely from home should the need arise, John M responded by explaining that most employees have laptops. It is possible to use conference calling facilities.
- 7.3 Paul asked what would happen in the sheltered schemes if there was diagnosis of the virus within the home. John advised the 'deep cleans' would take place.
- 7.4 John M asked if there would be anything that Tenants' Committee Members would add or expect from SLH. Members stated that they were happy with the measures being taken.
- 7.5 John M advised that the next meeting scheduled for the 7th May will have to remain flexible, dependant on how the virus evolves and Government guidance on 'social distancing'.

8. Rethinking Tenants Involvement

- 8.1 John M presented the document 'Rethinking Tenant Engagement' and asked Members for feedback before the document is shared with the Board. John M explained there will be a new strategy for involvement for the next 3 years. John M asked members to think about what motivates people and how SLH can build up more trust with tenants to strengthen feedback and involvement with tenants. John M stated there SLH was investing additional resources in this area. He added that SLH needed to get out and talk to people.
- 8.2 Tenants' Committee Members feedback on the document was positive; it is eye catching and makes you want to read it. Loraine suggested making some of the font simpler particularly for people with dyslexia. Loraine also added that there are other missed opportunities for positive feedback from people that are not an SLH tenants but where SLH contractors carry out work on their properties through Castle and Coasts to a high standard. It would also be an idea to have community champions to support with engaging with tenants.
- 8.3 John S asked if one or two of the Board members could attend a future Tenants' Committee meeting so that dialogue can be opened, and future worked towards. John S also feels that changing the name of 'Tenants Committee' to 'Tenants Panel' may help with recruitment of new members in the future. John M suggested this be added to the next Annual General Meeting agenda.
- 8.4 Jim asked how many people had registered for the 'My account', John M explained around 800. There is work on-going to make changes to the website and the portal, there is also a need to keep evolving them as customer expectations were increasing. John M also highlighted a need to recruit new Board members and that identifying tenants with the right skills was also an important feature of the new strategy, stating that it is about being proactive and SLH going to them.

9. Next Meeting – May 7th 2020 10:30am-12:30pm Windermere Room.

The meeting closed at 1pm.