

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES

1:30pm 12th November 2020 via Go-To-Meeting

Present: Stephen Bolton (Chair)
Sue Layfield
Jim Layfield
Lorraine Birchall
Charles Howarth

Guests N/A

Staff in attendance: John Mansergh – Director of Business Assurance
Lyn Richardson – Tenant Engagement Officer
Emma Wilson – Governance Support Assistant (minutes)
Alison Kinnon – Director of Customers (part)

Apologies: Dorothy Dixon
John Short
Paul Athersmith
June Peckston

Circulation: As above

ACTION

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING 10TH SEPTEMBER 2020- MATTERS ARISING

1.1 Minutes of the meeting 10th September 2020 were **approved** as a true and accurate record.

1.2 3.2 – Lorraine wanted to clarify; different fonts for anyone with dyslexia can be difficult to read and the use of capitals are sometimes smaller than the rest of the word. This can be confusing. Low contrast between text and background this can be very hard to distinguish if you have visual impairment.

EW

2. MINUTES OF THE AGM 10TH SEPTEMBER 2020 – MATTERS ARISING

2.1 Matters arising

It was discussed at the AGM some tenants wished to change the name of the Tenants' Committee and an email was subsequently sent to all Committee members for their opinion. John S asked that Forum not be used, and suggested Panel would be more suitable. Dorothy emailed to say she does not see the need to change or amend the current name. Tenants' Committee members present at the meeting decided to keep the name the same.

3. PROPOSED RENT SETTING 2021/22

3.1 Alison discussed the annual rent report due to go to the Board tonight for approval. The report is to assure the Board that rents remain affordable and to discuss the increase in rent for 2021/22. From April 2020, rent controls transitioned to the new Rent Standard based on an annual inflation increase of no more than Consumer Price Index (CPI), plus 1% over five years. CPI in September 2020 was 0.5% by adding to this the maximum increase of +1%, rents would increase by 1.5% from April 2021. While rents need to remain affordable we need to ensure we can set rents that provide revenue to cover the costs of maintaining our properties and continue to function as a viable organisation. SLH rents are amongst the lowest across all the sector and to apply a lower increase than the 1.5% increase would impact on SLH being able to meet its strategic targets. Alison will be urging the Board to approve the 1.5% increase from April next year and asking the Board to note the rents and service charge policy. The additional 5% will only apply to void properties when relet this will not apply to current tenants. The 1.5% increase will also apply to garages that are let.

3.2 The Committee are happy to recommend to Board that the rent increase is approved.

3.3 Sue asked about their previously rented garage in Grange she is aware that people are interested in renting this, but it has not been advertised. Alison responded that due to Covid we had to stop the process of getting the void properties relet. When we returned to work following the first lockdown, we had to catch up making the void properties a priority. Garage lets have been reviewed and we now have a Covid secure way to relet them, they will start to be advertised on SLH website. To date we have relet 102 homes since starting the relet process up after lockdown this is double the homes, we would usually relet in the same time frame.

4. COVID AND PERFORMANCE UPDATE

4.1 John shared an update with Tenants' Committee members, in terms of the second lockdown there are no major changes to services. There are some things that are not thought to be a priority such as posting out vouchers if people have responded to surveys and where there is more than 2 people working in close proximity we need to amend the procedure to work being carried out. We have no staff off currently with Covid symptoms and only 2 extremely vulnerable employees that are working from home.

The Committee thanked John for the update.

5. COMPLAINTS POLICY

5.1 John made Committee members aware of the changes within the new Complaints Policy, which had been updated following the Committee's review of the Housing Ombudsman's Compliant Handling Code Self-Assessment. The Board appeals stage has been removed from the policy as part of the process. Following a compliant contact will now be made over the phone to try and engage with the tenant and help resolve the compliant quicker. We have also set up an internal customer satisfaction feedback group to review and learn lessons from complaints and how they are handled. John sought

endorsement from the Committee before Board approval. The Committee endorsed the Policy.

- 5.2 Jim pointed out that the Policy currently on the website is difficult to access. John commented that one of the actions from the Complaint Handling Code is to have the Policy more accessible and at the forefront of the website.

JM

6. ENERGY EFFICIENCY

- 6.1 John updated the Committee on slides recently shared with the Board. John provided a brief overview of the greening strategy. The plan is to invest in the stock and upgrade properties that are below an EPC rating of band C. We are working hard to get all properties surveyed this will provide understanding of how many properties will require upgrading. The government target is to have all properties up to band C by 2030, SLH's ambition is to bring this forward to 2025. There will be some external expertise brought in to provide guidance. The slides highlight hard to deal with properties such as those that are stone built. We also need to ensure we make the right investment. Approximately £11-13 million will be required to upgrade the properties, currently we have $\frac{3}{4}$ of the budget required and will be applying for grant funding. The strategy also include better energy efficiency for new developments as the costs of retrofitting is more difficult. John made the Committee aware that Lyn represents SLH at the Kendal Climate Change Group.

- 6.2 Charles commented that we need to ensure we don't make properties too hot in the summer due to additional insulation and sealing of the vents. Charles pointed out this can lead to damp problems as the building sweats. John will ensure that Charles comments are sent to Richard Hayes.

JM

- 6.3 Sue asked whether SLH considering solar power. John responded yes along with battery storage which would provide a back-up supply to be called off instead of accessing the grid. We can support tenants to save and use the energy resulting in a benefit of reduced bills. Airsource will be looked at again as part of a alternatives to gas but that this more medium to longer term thinking.

7. ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

- 7.1 Lyn shared information around everything that happens on the Facebook page. Lyn highlighted that we are trying to ensure we have the majority of people on the page being tenants. Lots of information has added around funding schemes, resident's associations often post updates and we shared information around the scrutiny and what this involves and how we use the information gathered to shape services. Lyn has liaised with Kim around a focus group and getting tenants more involved in this, particularly around repairs. Lots of work is happening around digital engagement due to Covid. Lyn invited some of the Tenants' Committee members to post on the FaceBook page if they have information they feel would be of benefit to the community or tenants.

- 7.2 Jim asked if they could have monthly updates from the Facebook page. Lyn responded the information is gathered each quarter but would be happy to share information monthly.

LR

6. Any other Business

6.1 Stephen shared information regarding the 'Community Hero Awards' which was set up on the Facebook page. Tenants were asked to nominate people that they felt had gone the extra mile and helped their communities. Over 50 responses were received Lyn, Fiona, Emily and Stephen went through the nominations and decided on the 12 winners. They have ensured that they have spread the nominations across the district. Lyn is currently in the process of sending out the certificates. Lyn will be contacting the winners following easing of the lockdown to get pictures and share this on the Facebook page. Stephen added this may be done again next year around March April time due to the excellent response. Lyn added she will be contacting all the people that were nominated but didn't win to try and build on relationships in the community and to see if there is any way SLH can provide additional support.

6.2 John S emailed that the sheltered Cat 2 schemes have signs all over entrance doors and notice boards telling visitors & residents to sanitise hands on arrival & leaving, but nothing to sanitise them with. Also there seems to be no restriction on having visitors. Should one resident catch Covid 19 it could spread like wildfire through the scheme. More help and better guidance are needed. John M asked that this be sent to Alison Kinnon.

EW

6.3 Stephen raised concerns about the My Account he has received reports that there are not enough options when reporting a repair around the specifics of the repair and when the repair is complete it is not closed off. Tenants' Committee members were assured some time ago that all information including certificates for their own properties would be accessible but this is not the case. Loraine added the system is slow. John responded that a project team had been reviewing options for improving My Account and the website. John assured Stephen that the concerns raised are being considered when choosing a new product. John suggested adding to the engagement plan for March that Stephen Roe and Emily Graveson to come to the next meeting to show what has been reviewed so far and to get Tenants' Committee involved.

LR

6.4 Sue asked about complaints relating to sub-contractors and whether SLH that check up on contractor work, there are lots of times Sue is aware of contractors being used and tenants being happy with contractors being used. Lyn said this will be a scrutiny panel question and will be raised.

LR

7. Date of Next Meeting – 14th January 2020