

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES

2pm 14th October 2021 via Zoom

Present: Sue Layfield
Jim Layfield
Charles Howarth
Stephen Bolton
Lorraine Birchall

Guests N/A

Staff in attendance: Cath Purdy – Chief Executive (part)
John Mansergh – Director of Business Assurance
Fiona Harrison – Allocations Manager (part)
Kim Doran – Head of Repairs (part)
Emma Wilson – Governance Support Assistant (minutes)

Apologies: Dorothy Dixon
John Short
Paul Athersmith

Circulation: As above include all managers

ACTION

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING 15th July 2021- MATTERS ARISING

1.1 The minutes from the meeting held on 15th July 2021 were approved as a true and accurate record.

1.2 The Committee were unformed of June Peckston's passing. Lyn will arrange for a card to be sent to the family and a donation to be made to the Royal British Legion in line with family wishes. She will also keep members up to date of funeral arrangements if the information is available.

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2. CUSTOMER DIRECTORATE TEAM ANNUAL REPORTS 2020/21

2.1 Fiona shared highlights from the reports with TC members to offer assurance to what was a unique and challenging year. Year-end performance is highlighted in the reports as is areas to work on and improve in the following year.

- Despite the housing market being closed during lock down the allocations team still managed to relet 228 homes.
- The Income team supported customers sign posting them to agencies for support mainly food banks referrals and citizen advice. Universal credit was upped during the pandemic this has now ceased the team will be monitoring income closely to see if there is any impact.
- No tenants have been evicted this year notice of seeking possessions reduced by 50%.
- The Income team maintained top quartile for rent arrears supporting tenants to avoid enforcement action.

- The Tenancy Management team had to find new ways of working during the pandemic. Sign ups have become fully digital enabling the process to continue in a safe way.
- Email is second popular way to make contact following phone call.
- Avaya phones have been added to laptops to improve customer waiting times.
- High level Customer satisfaction with ASB cases.
- Delivery of neighbourhood plans.
- Monitoring customer call backs and monitoring of the contact to ensure customers get a response in a timely manner.
- Customer call recording will be introduced from mid-October to improve customer experience and provide training to colleagues where needed.

2.2 John S shared feedback via email the new allocations policy for CBL is welcome and now only has 3 bands which is also an improvement. The Housing Options Team report is clear & understandable. The Income Management Team did an excellent job in keeping rent arrears as low as they did.

2.3 Cath added the teams have done remarkably well with the pandemic and wished to say huge well done to all colleagues involved. The Chair and TC members also wished to thank the teams for keeping SLH running to such high standards during very difficult times.

3. THE CHALLENGES AHEAD – IMPROVING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

3.1 Cath was unable to share a prepared presentation due to a technical hitch so updated TC members verbally with the presentation being sent out via email following the meeting. SLH performance is ok, this was highlighted in the previous STAR survey that was issued in 2018. Recently we have been asking is ok good enough for our customers and are we able to make improvements to benefit the customer experience. This also links to the Social Housing White Paper treating customers with respect, listening to their concerns, and putting in place a fair and safe system for all tenants. SLH wants to set higher standards of customer care. Processes can be siloed meaning there are gaps and we need to make improvements. Processes and systems house lots of data we need to ensure we can access the data in an easily accessible way to be clear we can respond to what customers want from SLH. We are reviewing our culture and people this will enable people to be responsible and accountable. There are two main drivers the customers and our approach to neighbourhoods and communities. We will be launching a customer first approach next year there will be development and training for colleagues.

3.2 Charles asked about communication and that some terminology can be difficult to understand so can tenants be involved in supporting with proposed changes. Cath responded she would like the colleague that is communicating with the customer to think about how the communication is coming across to the customer. We need a customer first approach. We need to ensure colleagues have the skills to do this with training and checking back with other colleagues. TC members to approve sample letters. We would like to have a more personable approach and make contact via the phone rather than sending out lots of letters.

3.3 Loraine asked if there was any where we can highlight scams for tenants and share this as she was targeted by a phone call with very persistent manner asking for access to personal information. Cath suggested the Communications officer do a campaign on FB. TC members also highlighted the tie to SLDC and Tenants not recognising the fact that we are no longer part of the Council. Cath agreed with TC

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members and said we need to think about future branding which TC members will be consulted on.

4. REPAIRS POLICY UPDATE AND SURVEY FEEDBACK

- 4.1 Kim shared a brief overview of the policy, including adding some guidelines for the shared ownership properties. John S emailed to say sheltered housing is not mentioned this can be a grey area. Kim explained that there is an appendix that sits alongside the policy, covering sheltered housing and out of hours emergency definitions (i.e. the repairs handbook). The repairs handbook also covers the handyman service which enables tenants who are vulnerable or of pension age to request services around the home this would also cover tenants in sheltered schemes. TC members requested Kim add all medical devices to the emergency out of hours appendix.

5. GOVERNANCE AND PERFORMANCE

- 5.1 John M shared an update from the SLH AGM & Board meeting held on the 12th August. The amended rules mean that SLDC are no longer a Shareholder and no longer have a seat at the Board table. Susanne Long is on the Board but now as an independent member. The rules are being signed and sent off the Financial Conduct Authority. The Board also approved the new financial plan, this is tighter due to the current development pipeline. A funding memorandum will be sent out to raise £25m for new developments and support the programme to invest in energy efficiency for existing homes. The Board approved several developments at its last meeting including large schemes in Kendal, Sedbergh and Ambleside. The gas servicing contract is up for review in the next 6 months. Yewbarrow Lodge is at the start of being redeveloped with a competition for architects to share design ideas. Three properties at The Ellers in Ulverston have structural issues so the Board has recommended disposal to the open market. SLH is also working with CCC on void properties to support refugees. Board membership will be promoted next year. Rent setting will be a challenge for the Board and CPI is expected to be around 4% which is a high and will impact on other areas of the business if we don't increase. The Board Strategy day next week will look into the options and priorities. Charles added gas and electric price increases will also impact on affordability along with rent increases will be a huge impact on tenants. Can we look at more affordable forms of heating and lighting. John M responded this is being addressed through the greening agenda.

- 5.2 John then spoke about the latest performance results. There was a discussion on the following items;

- There has been an increase in Covid cases at SLH with colleagues mainly contracting through children. There are shortages with materials and recruitment issues which is having an impact on the repairs service. There has been a recruitment drive on trades, but we are still short. The back log of repairs has been cleared but this is still causing issues with how quickly we can book in repairs.
- Customer satisfaction surveys are showing customers are dissatisfied with time take to complete repairs. The STAR Survey results will be shared in the new year meeting.
- Sickness is growing mainly due to mental health and musculoskeletal injuries. Managers are tightening up on managing sickness levels, with some colleagues recently leaving the organisation.
- Rent collection is going well, many tenants have lost the additional £20 a week top up payment and Furlough has come to an end. This could have an impact on rent arrears but it's unknown at present.

- New developments – 44 new homes have been delivered already this year, mainly through section 106 acquisitions. The outturn will be around 70+ by the end of the year which will be the best yet.
- Sheltered Housing reletting the voids is an issue, there is a campaign to get these filled.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 None.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 11th November 2021.