

SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES

12pm 19th January 2023 Windermere Room

Present: Charles Howarth
Lesley Peters
Paul Athersmith
Dorothy Dixon
Pauline Vaughan
Henry Semple

Guests N/A

Officers in attendance: John Mansergh – Director of Business Improvement
Lyn Richardson – Customer Engagement Partner
Emma Wilson – Corporate Support Assistant (Notes)
Stephen Roe – Head of Transformation, Digital & Data
Niki Stockton -Director of Customer Experience (Virtually)

Apologies: Sarah Benjamin
Gaynor Aplin
Sue Layfield
Lorraine Birchall

Circulation: As above include all managers

ACTION

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING 10th NOVEMBER 2022

1.1 Members of the Committee approved the Minutes 11th November 2022 as a true and accurate record.

1.2 Matters Arising

Tenants Committee Members were informed John Short and Chair Stephen Bolton have resigned from Tenants Committee and Stephen has also stepped down from the Board.

Lyn chaired the meeting in the absence of the Vice Chair who has given apologies for the meeting.

The Committee would like to pass on their thanks to both John and Stephen for their continued support over the years.

Lyn welcomed Henry to his first Tenants Committee meeting; members introduced themselves.

2. PERFORMANCE & GOVERNANCE UPDATE (JM)

2.1 Current Performance Q3

The number of new homes expected to be delivered was 126 we will now deliver 88 homes. We are slightly behind our initial target of delivery; this is due to pulling out of one of the schemes reflecting SLH's risk appetite around shared ownership properties, not paying over the odds for schemes, and delays with Section 106 purchases off developers. We will still deliver the S106 properties but in the next financial year.

Rent collection is going ok, we are in a better position at this time than we anticipated a few months ago. We are still aware this remains a risk due to cost-of-living pressures which is impacting on tenants. The Income Team are working hard to support tenants who are struggling, offering benefits advice and referrals to local support agencies, and agreeing repayment plans.

Building Safety – there have been some access issues with gas servicing, but this is improving and where needed we have started legal proceedings to gain access. We have around 20 outstanding 5-year electrical inspections and the team are working closely with Neighbourhood Partners to reduce the number which is coming down week on week.

My Account – 1057 customers signed up approx. 30% of residents, with 324 logging into their account last month. We are aiming to increase numbers further. There was a campaign before Christmas to encourage residents to sign up putting them into a prize draw to win an Ipad. TC members asked what about those who are already signed up could we run something for users.

Customer call backs currently at 84% we are working with colleagues and managers to improve this. We are encouraging colleagues to ensure customers receive calls when they are promised them and for this to happen within the 48hrs allocated time.

Void (empty property) relet times have significantly improved on last year.

Sickness absence is far better than in previous years.

2.2 RSH V2 Regulatory rating for viability

The rating given to SLH has been set by the Regulator of Social Housing. We must submit various pieces of information and the Regulator uses this to carry out an annual stability check. At the end of the process we get a regulatory judgement. On this occasion we have been regraded from V1 to V2 on financial viability. As an association we are still performing well for governance, we have maintained our G1 Rating. The reason for the regulator taking SLH from V1 to V2 is because of the additional economic pressures on our financial plan, rent restrictions, investment in existing and new homes and therefore reduced capacity to respond to other risks. This is the same for a lot of other housing associations with the RSH estimating around third of them be regraded from V1 -V2.

Charles added we are taking a little bit more risk SLH are still stable and V2 is still a very good rating and reflects SLH's current position. John added the current financial position is tighter than previously, but this is due to economic factors and SLH's ambition to deliver development and energy efficiency works early by 2025 and major repairs.

Dorothy added that there seems to be a lot of emphasis on shared ownership (SO) as rather than rental. John responded that some of this is about local planning policy and about scheme viability as some of the SO properties cross subsidise the rental elements of a scheme. There is also a significant demand for SO properties within the local area so that we are trying to satisfy an element of local demand. Niki added there is an expectation from Homes England that 50% of homes developed with grant funding are SO.

The Board has reviewed their risk appetite in the light of the current market conditions and would like to have less SO and more rental products moving forward to reduce the risk. The Board has also approved to apply the maximum rental increase set by government at 7% which recognises the need to receive as much income as possible to deliver the priorities.

2.3 **Tenant Scrutiny Recommendations**

John informed TC members that the recommendations are reported to both TC and the Board and progress with implementing recommendations is monitored by the Audit & Risk Committee. We are in the process of reviewing current outstanding recommendations and what needs to happen to complete them. We will ensure moving forward that TC members receive regular updates.

2.4 **TSM Progress**

John will share an update on Consumer Regulation at the next meeting. The TSM's have been developed a set of KPI's - mix of process and customer satisfaction. From the 1st April 2023 information will be collected and reported to the Regulator from April 2024 and they will then assess what good looks like for all housing associations and compare performance. We need to publish and share this with residents; we will involve TC members on how we do this to ensure it is in a format that is meaningful and understandable to residents. There are other transactional satisfaction measures that we are reporting on that can be seen on the KPI report sent out.

Tenant Satisfaction Survey (Perception)

A tenant satisfaction survey was issued to our tenants by an external provider TLF (TC members supported SLH in procurement). We received just over 700 surveys back approx. 28% response rate which is fantastic given the average returns across the sector is around 10%. Results will be reported at the next meeting. TC members will support how we drive improvements in each of the areas.

Tenant Scrutiny Planning

Charles asked if all areas of the business have been scrutinised over the last few years? Niki responded suggesting a mapping exercise similar to the one we undertake for Internal Audit, considering SLH Business Strategy, the Sector Risk Profile and reviewing what has been done over the last 3 years.

LR/ NS

Board Membership & Customer Voice

SLH review what we are doing around Resident Engagement and ensuring the Board hear the customer voice with the organisation every 3 years. John explained that there is a lot of learning and experimenting taking place across the sector to improve engagement, new members of staff bringing new ideas and many residents saying that they wanted to get involved in the recent survey. He added that Zarina will be joining as the new Customer First Manager at the end of March and previously worked for Irwell Valley. Angela Tinkler joined in Oct 2022 as Head of Governance and Risk and will support the SLH governance structure. We need to involve residents and work through what this looks like over the first 6 months of 23/24.

Henry added he would like to get involved in the future with communication he said he was not sure who the Neighbourhood Assistants are, and surveys need to be clearer or explain.

Pauline suggested it would be easier for some people who may like to be involved to join online. Lyn responded saying this is a great idea we have the IT equipment but need to ensure people are given support and training to enable this to happen.

Niki explained that Aimee Wood, Independent Living Lead is due to start her maternity leave at the end of the month and we have interviewed to cover the post and have appointed a woman called Alison, who has lots of experience of managing and improving sheltered schemes. Further to previous discussions at TC, we are about to start communication with sheltered tenants to transfer the TEC Emergency Pull Cord service over to SPS Doorguard. This will be a phased mobilisation process due to the business-critical nature of this service. We will test equipment to ensure it is working and there is a smooth transition. As TC members are aware there is also a sheltered housing review underway, with a questionnaire recently issued to find out what residents think of the current service and what they would the service to look like and are willing to pay for. Alison will be leading this whilst Aimee is off.

3. SLH APPROACH TO DAMP & MOULD

3.1 In response to the national media and recent tragic death of Awaab Ishak in Rochdale SLH have been reviewing what our internal processes are and how we assess the prevalence of damp and mould (D&M). We currently have about 130 cases within SLH properties none of which are categorised as high health and safety risks.

One of the changes to our internal process is to follow up with the tenant after we have been to the property to treat D&M. New processes and new communications are being sent to tenants, we have a cross directorate team working to ensure D&M cases are regularly reviewed and we get to the source and treat the problem. We are trying to change culture and following the recent MGI training, using terminology 'Let's Make it Happen'. Colleagues are being trained in technical support and understanding of different scenarios.

TC agreed to monitor the D&M action plan at future meetings and to review customer communications. John shared the latest information being issued and asked TC members to feedback at the next meeting or beforehand.

Pauline raised concerns that she had experienced damp in her property earlier in the year and that it had taken a long time for SLH to respond, adding that complex cases do require additional support. John added that he was disappointed to hear her experience but that would not be the case with the new process put in place. Pauline agreed to share her experience to help colleagues understand and apply empathy in future.

Henry added the windows at Castle Walk have been replaced, he is happy with windows and no mould has appeared since replacement. Henry would like to see SLH colleagues out and about in the community where we have properties. NB Estate Walkabouts are carried out every quarter.

Charles suggested revisiting what has already been done in the past such as the issuing of the barometers.

Niki added we have started customer first training programme but we do have some way to go and we need to drive and embed this in our culture and improve our service. There are things we are not getting right but we do also get some positive feedback.

Steve joined the meeting 1pm

4. DIGITAL UPDATE – MY ACCOUNT OMNICHANNEL – PRESENTATION

- 4.1 Steve talked TC members through a presentation on My Account and the interface with Omnichannel. The My Account mobile app allows customers to access various pieces of information and self-serve without contacting SLH by phone. They can see information like rent statements and make payments, agreement details, my new home information and log a repair. Currently tenants are unable to choose a repair appointment more than a week ahead, but this is being worked towards with Cx. Customers can also report concerns and end their tenancy using the forms within the system.

The Omnichannel is a platform that will enable Customer Services to have all communication methods in one system such as email, phone, Chatbot and it also allows them to see call wait times.

We are introducing scripts to support customer services to help diagnose repairs and support with gathering the information that is relevant to the enquiry.

Charles shared positive feedback around the phone and using mobile devices. Charles reported some emails issued by SLH are not readable as font too small – log with IT to investigate.

SR

**Action
Complete**

Henry asked for support to enable access to his My Account.

LR

Steve left the meeting 1.30pm

5. RENT & SERVICE CHARGE SETTING

- 5.1 Niki shared an update with TC members about the rent and service charge increase from April 2023 ; the Board has approved a 7% rent increase which was the cap that the Government set for general needs social and affordable rents. Shared Ownership and Sheltered (Supp) could have increased by up to RPI plus 0.5% and CPI plus 1% respectively but Board have approved capping at 7% as well, along with garages. This has been a difficult decision and we recognise the impact this will have on residents. SLH are a not for profit organisation and all income is invested back into services, existing homes, and building new homes. SLH have an ambitious target of EPC C for all homes by 2025 (ahead of 2030 Govt target) which will also require investment to bring existing homes up to standard. We are investing in our communities and neighbourhoods, digital services and providing a responsive repairs service 365 days a year. We are developing customer communications in addition to the formal notification letters.
- 5.2 We operate variable service charges which are made up by the cost of the service and a management charge. We do not currently fully recover the actual costs across the business. An Internal Audit was carried out and a Service Charge Project will commence next year. We have reviewed this years costs and proposed charges with Finance and the main increases are due to energy costs across the 3 Category 2 sheltered schemes, which are not covered by the domestic cap, with costs increasing between 400%-500% equating to approx. £110,000 across 3 schemes which are outside of SLH control. We are reviewing this and considering how we may be able to provide some subsidy to reduce the costs to residents. We are also looking at how we can control and reduce consumption on communal heating and providing information to residents on energy efficiency, costs and how to try and reduce usage. We are going to introduce heat metering for the individual flats so residents can control their own heating and provide information which we hope will lead to a reduction in consumption. We also hope that the recent reduction in gas prices will be passed on to us all by the energy companies.
- 5.3 Dorothy asked if service charges for her block could detail in the letters if the charges have been divided by 10 or 5 as some charges are only for the tenants in the upstairs flats. A section 20 letter is due to be issued around consultation of planned works. Dorothy suggested a leaseholder meeting to discuss issues and raise the profile. Lyn added there will be a Waterside resident meeting to engage with tenants and leaseholders. It was suggested this scheme/ block specific issue was taken away and discussed separately.
- 5.4 Charles asked if the heating within sheltered schemes is as efficient as it can be to reduce the cost of bills. Niki explained we are aiming to ensure all properties are EPC C by 2025 and understands the majority of Cat 2 sheltered already meet this standard, reducing heat loss. The Building Safety Team are meeting the contractor who services and maintains the heating systems next week to discuss how the heating can be controlled in the building. Neighbourhood Assistants will be assisting with communication to customers.
- 5.5 Lesley asked if the communal areas in sheltered schemes could be used as warm spaces. Lyn responded funding is unlikely due to this not being a public space. Charles added funding isn't required but there would be restrictions on public access as there are vulnerable tenants living in the schemes and

**EW
Resolved**

insurance would need to be considered. SLDC & SLH have approx. 200 Warm Hubs advertised on their websites.

- 5.6 Pauline said her service charge is low and asked if she could have a breakdown of what her service charge covers. LR will ask Neighbourhoods and get back to Pauline.

**EW
Resolved**

6. TENANT SCRUTINY UPDATE – VOIDS

- 6.1 Lyn explained a void is when a property is empty following a tenant ending their tenancy. Void management covers a large area of the business and crosses lots of teams. Paul & Charles carried out the Void Scrutiny, including visiting a couple of void properties. One was a high cost turn around due to the condition it was left in and another was left in excellent condition. Charles added the carpets and curtains were in a good state of repair and could have been kept. Niki explained there is a group looking at how we can better recycle/ pass on any items left in a good condition.
- 6.2 Mangers were asked a series of questions that the Scrutiny Group had put together. Lyn shared the summary of findings with TC members and what had come out of the report and proposed recommendations.
- 6.3 Charles requested that the report needs to be amended – second page adaptations are Adult Social Care not SLDC.
- 6.4 Scrutiny Panel to determine priorities and what is Low Medium or High, with the manager considering if it is low medium or high in terms of the work required to implement.
- 6.5 A lesson this time has been to consider the scope carefully and how customers can add the most value in terms of improving specific business areas.

Tenants Committee approved the Void Scrutiny Report, findings and recommendations for presentation to Board.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 7.1 Charles and Paul reviewed a compliant which the resident requested was submitted to a Stage 3 Tenant's Committee Panel in December 22, they informed committee members that the compliant was not upheld but a small token of good will was given in the form of a voucher.
- 7.2 Niki confirmed we are reporting all Stage 3 Complaints and Housing Ombudsman enquiries/ outcomes to Audit & Risk.
- 7.3 Tenants Committee members asked what the Sustainability Manager's role involves. John suggested inviting Gareth to the next meeting.

EW

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 16TH March 2023 Venue TBC