

## SOUTH LAKES HOUSING TENANTS' COMMITTEE MINUTES

12pm 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023 Windermere Room

- Present: Lesley Peters (virtually)  
Paul Athersmith  
Pauline Vaughan (part)  
Henry Semple (observer)  
Carol Anderson (observer)  
Nick Harrison (observer)  
Sue Layfield  
Jim Layfield
- Guests N/A
- Officers in attendance: John Mansergh – Director of Business Improvement  
Lyn Richardson – Customer Engagement Partner  
Emma Wilson – Corporate Support Assistant (Notes)  
Susan Claxton – Head of Assets & Building Safety (virtually)  
Sean Ellam -Head of Neighbourhoods (virtually)
- Apologies: Sarah Benjamin  
Gaynor Aplin  
Lorraine Birchall  
Charles Howarth  
Dorothy Dixon
- Circulation: As above include all managers

### ACTION

#### 1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

- 1.1 Members of the Committee approved the Minutes 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023 as a true and accurate record.
- 1.2 Lyn welcomed observers to the meeting explaining her role within SLH. Introductions took place around the room. Lyn suggested moving meetings to other locations in the future to increase participation and to hear other voices.

#### 2. PERFORMANCE & GOVERNANCE UPDATE

- 2.1 John M provided the update.

##### **Performance and SLH update**

Rent arrears and rent performance collection is still looking good given the current cost of living crisis pressures for many of our tenants. Rental income is still lower than we have recorded previously.

Repairs performance is improving but we acknowledge there is further work to do. There are no vacancies within the Repairs Team however there are added pressures given the recent damp & mould cases and on-going works and surveys being completed. We will be launching the new repairs online booking service soon and this is being extensively tested in house before going live. Tenants will still be able to book repairs through all other methods of contact such as email, live chat, and telephone.

There have been 42 new developments handed over, 16 Right to Buys and SLH has disposed of 3 due to them not being able to upgrade them to decent standard and the undesirable small living spaces.

Complaints have risen due to damp & mould (D&M) case reports to around 4.5 per month. The team are working hard to resolve issues to prevent a complaint in the first instance. We have a learning loop in place which involves managers and others around the business feeding in to prevent the same complaint happening again and supports learning.

John responded to a question about the complaints procedures. He explained that most complaints are resolved at stage 1 (manager review) around 80%, with all cases resolved at stage 2 (director or head of service review). There is an option for the tenant to have their case heard by the tenant compliant panel prior to going to the Housing Ombudsman (HO) but this is not intended to stop a compliant going to the HO. The HO is naming and shaming Landlords for poor practice and not resolving D&M cases quickly and effectively. John highlighted the tragic death of Awaab Ishak. The Government has tabled amendments to the Social Housing Regulation Bill to bring in 'Awaabs law.' This will implement strict new time limits on fixing D&M issues within tenant's homes. SLH currently has 230 D&M cases 30+ cases have been completed but we have now introduced 3,6 & 9 month follow up reviews. SLH have also introduced a priority system for tenants with vulnerabilities, older adults, or those with children. Finding the root cause of the D&M is a priority. John agreed to bring the new Damp & Mould Policy to TC following review by the Board. JM

Pauline asked how SLH deals with language barriers and support people who's first language is not English to complain. John responded we are working on data collection to gain better insight into our customers and the new Customer First Manager is due to start next week her name is Zarina and she will be supporting the customer insight and data collection projects.

Henry asked regarding D&M we did once have moisture reading devices issued could these be used again or reissued. John advised that detection of D&M is undertaken by qualified surveyors with specialist equipment. He added that the devices were helpful but better solutions were available and that is being considered.

### **Building safety**

We have a new provider Pennington Choices carrying out Fire Risk Assessments in sheltered properties and where we have communal areas.

Gas safety and electrical safety checks are almost at 100% where we have not met the 100% target this is due to access issues. Contact has been made

with most and appointments booked in where this has not happened legal proceedings have been started.

## 2.2 **RSH V2 Regulatory rating for viability & In Depth Assessment (IDA)**

The rating given to SLH has been set by the Regulator of Social Housing. 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 to V2.

SLH are due to have an In-Depth Assessment from the Regulator in April and May and this will review how the organisation is run and how resilient the financial forecasting is. This will be done on site with Directors and Heads of Service. Inspectors will also sit in to observe the May Board meeting. They will review various pieces of information from around the business to gain assurance that SLH has good governance structures in place to meet its tenants needs and regulatory requirements.

## 2.3 **Board Recruitment**

We have a vacancy for the Audit & Risk Committee Chair and for a Tenant Board member following Stephen Bolton stepping down. Initial recruitment will focus on filling the A&R Chair. We will then be reviewing how we engage with tenants to fill the Tenant Board member position and provide support and training for the position. We are reviewing induction and support and Lesley is helping to do this.

*Sean joined the meeting 12.30pm*

## 3. **TENANCY FRAUD POLICY**

3.1 Sean joined the meeting highlighting that there has been little change within the policy other than the addition to the reference regarding the Social Housing Fraud Act 2013.

3.2 Henry asked if relevant checks were in place to prevent fraud happening and tenants subletting and asked what the cost is to SLH. Sean explained initial checks are completed early on in the process. It can be difficult to assess the cost, but this would impact on the team in terms of prevention and collaborating with tenants. Case type reporting has been created for tenancy management and tenancy fraud to be able to access data easily. This is then monitored by Neighbourhood partners. Reports from other neighbours would remain confidential.

*Sean left the meeting 1.15pm*

#### **4. VALUE FOR MONEY STRATEGY**

- 4.1 John shared the purpose of the value for money strategy – it is about investing in areas that will have the biggest impact on our tenants' lives. For example investing in energy efficiency in tenant's homes will reduce bills and supports the environment. Customer experience training has been another big investment, we hope this will give colleagues the skills they need to improve the customer experience. Procurement and contractor services are reviewed to ensure we have the best value for money.

Tenants raised a number of areas of importance to them including ensuring that SLH choose products carefully and not going for the cheapest option e.g. poor quality paint, kitchen fittings and doing partial bathroom repairs that were not completed right first time. Tenants feel that being involved at the procurement stage would support better decision making and transparency.

*Gareth joined the meeting at 1.35pm*

#### **5. SUSTAINABILITY**

- 5.1 Gareth joined the meeting and introduced himself as the new Sustainability Manager with his role will be to support SLH and colleagues to meet the carbon zero target by 2050. Cumbria hope to get to net zero by 2037. We have a legal obligation to support the environment and stop sea levels rising. SLH needs to lead the way and given the fact that 40% of gases come from people's homes, SLH homes need to be energy efficient. Homes should be built to last a long time and be comfortable and nice. Outdoor spaces are being considered as part of improving environment quality. Tree policies are being developed for SLH- we need to connect our communities to get people to walk and bike to and from home or work. Reduce waste think about repairs cafes giving objects a longer shelf life and not just throwing items away. Other areas for consideration when developing new homes are good transport links with accessible shops and local services to get people walking and biking more. This is the start of our journey we are learning together. Gareth asked for ideas from TC members about how we can listen to residents' voices and set up ideas and requests to meet resident's needs.

- 5.2 Carol mentioned composting and water butts that are being supplied free by SLDC. All SLH properties are being reviewed in terms of their energy rating. With Government support SLH wants to bring all properties up to an EPC C rating. All new homes will be energy efficient. We need to ensure the fabric of the home is well insulated to then take air source heat pump. All new homes will have electric charging points. Renewable energy needs to be considered how do we create our energy for consumption.

- 5.3 Lesley asked about guidance around electric vehicle charging points and if these have been installed at tenant's front doors. Gareth responded the Government has a long way to go but SLH are installing them at tenant's new build properties as standard.

- 5.4 Paul asked about his thermostat being moved from his hallway to the lounge. This has been sent through to the building safety team for a decision.

*Gareth left the meeting at 2pm*

*Susan joined the meeting 2pm*

**6. FIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN & POLICY**

6.1 Susan attended the meeting to share an update on the fire policy and management plan. The policy and plan are nearly finalised and will be submitted to Board for approval. We will forward the policy and management plan in email to TC members as the management plan is over forty pages long.

**SC**

Fire regulations are different for tenants in their own homes to those living in flats and sheltered schemes with communal areas. Tenants who have mobility issues are assessed by doing a person-centred fire risk assessment conducted by the Neighbourhood Partners. Penningtons are the newly appointed contractor to complete the fire risk assessments. Tenants living in sheltered schemes and communal blocks will receive a letter explaining the days Penningtons will be on site.

Lesley raised concern about the fire escape in her communal area as another tenant was storing a tumble dryer. Susan to liaise with Alison and Neighbourhood Partner.

**Email sent to AW/SC**

**7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Sue asked if signage could be investigated again for Lunefield – what’s happening and when will this be put up?

**EW**

**8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023**