

WESLO TENANT PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the above meeting held on Thursday 16 July 2009 Bathgate Office at 7.00pm

Present from Weslo: Mike Bruce, Chief Executive
Gillian McAllister, Senior Housing Officer
Margaret Walker, Admin Officer
Kevin Cairns, ICT Manager

Tenants: Andrew Sneddon – Tenant Director, Bo'ness
Eileen Stirling – Tenant Director, Bathgate
Janette Wallace – Tenant Director, Stoneyburn
Evelyn Johnston – Livingston Station
Glen Mulligan – Fauldhouse
Jim Porter - Bathgate
Hugh Ruck – Livingston
Kevin Symon, Broxburn
Colin Torrie – East Calder
Sybil Watt – Bo'ness

1. Apologies for Absence

David McLaren, Housing Manager
June Harper, Housing Officer
Gordon Smith – Bo'ness

2. Chair

Gillian McAllister invited Glenn Mulligan to chair the meeting.

3. Previous Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2009 were approved

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Older Persons Advisory Project (OPAP)

Gillian provided an update on OPAP. To date there have been 57 home visits securing accumulated benefits of £118,860 for tenants; £12,386 of this was Housing Benefit.

Letters will be sent out to tenants in Glencoe, Whitburn and Langside Crescent, Polbeth over the next few weeks and the next steering Group meeting will take place on 11 August.

Several committee members advised that they had been contacted and all praised the professionalism of the OPAP staff.

6. Web site Presentation

Kevin gave an informative demonstration of the new web site that can be accessed at www.weslo-housing.org. He pointed out that he will be continually reviewing the web site to ensure that it stays up to date and fresh. One of the next things to be looked at will be the addition of new features such as "Brousealoud" and translation to other languages. The "Brousealoud" facility will make the web site speech-enabled, which means that you could download free software onto your personal computer and have the site read aloud to you. This would be of assistance to those tenants with sight problems.

The new Weslo web site offers some online services such as 'Reporting Repairs' & 'Paying your Rent' and a News section.

Since its introduction Kevin has recorded an increase of approximately 50 – 60% of people accessing the site.

Glenn thanked Kevin for his presentation and agreed that the new web site looked more user friendly.

7. New Members

The Tenant Newspaper distributed in June contained an article about the Tenant Participation Committee and invited any tenant interested in joining the committee to contact Weslo. As there have been no expressions of interest, Margaret wished the group to consider whether we should put something on the web site to see if we had any response. It was agreed that this would be worthwhile exploring and Margaret agreed to take this forward.

8. Question & Answer Session with Mike Bruce, Chief Executive

Glenn introduced Mike and invited questions.

Q. Sybil asked Mike to explain how Weslo determined what work would be included in the annual planned maintenance programme.

A. Mike explained that as a company we have a great deal of historical information on the stock. We have also carried out a number of stock condition surveys and this when taken with the existing maintenance records and feedback from staff are a good indicator of stock condition. The current programmes are heavily geared to ensure that we meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) in 2015. We are confident that we will meet this standard by the end of 2010. Thereafter we will need to maintain those standards.

Q. Glenn asked - Weslo are committing resources to the upgrade of the fabric of the buildings to meet the SHQS standards – all of which is worthwhile. What is Weslo's intention regarding external environmental works such as renewal of fences and provision of parking facilities on the estates?

A. Mike confirmed that we spend less money on this type of repair as we tend to deal with it on a reactive basis. He also confirmed that there is a requirement within the SHQS and we need to address it. In the past we have looked at establishing a standard for replacement fencing however it was found not to be cost effective.

With regards to parking provisions, this was a difficult but very topical question. The difficulty is that the majority of our estates are older and planning requirements for parking provision was not as generous as they are now. There are now many more cars on the road and many households have more than 1 car therefore demand for parking is excessive. It is an impossible situation for Weslo to resolve.

Q. Janette asked – Given that the Dunfermline Building Society was Weslo's principal lender, how will the change to Nationwide affect our loan portfolio and will there be any impact on tenant services?

Q. Hugh asked – Has Weslo as an RSL been affected by the restrictions on current lending facilities for new or future developments?

A. Mike agreed to take these 2 questions together as they are related to the present economic situation. Firstly, he advised that there will be no adverse impact on tenant services.

He confirmed that we have and continue to have a very good relationship with Dunfermline Building Society. Currently, we have £32m in loans and £6m development funding in place. There is no evidence as to what changes might apply but there are strict covenants in place with the building society regarding the conditions of the loans

We will be drawing down £1.2m for 24 flats at the beginning of August in Ladywell in Livingston. There have been no restrictions applied and the current loans are still in place.

Q. Andrew asked how the credit crunch was affecting Weslo.

A. Housing supply cannot meet current demand and social housing can attract help from the government in the form of housing benefit. The impact is more important for tenants, customers and business suppliers.

In order to assist them, we are currently looking to see if we might be able to introduce a range of incentives such as a Rent incentive scheme, which has already been considered by this committee, or a direct debit incentive scheme. Staff have been asked to explore these ideas with tenants and to provide feedback. We are also looking to see if we can set up an incentive scheme with some of our suppliers, perhaps to negotiate a discount for early payment thereby helping the local economy.

We will of course monitor the situation and see if there are other ways for us to respond positively.

Hugh commented that it would be helpful to the economy if all companies could be encouraged to pay their suppliers promptly.

As there were no other questions Glenn thanked Mike for his attendance at the meeting

Any Other Competent Business

- Eileen wished to thank Weslo for helping her to build up her self confidence. This has enabled her to seek out other interests in the wider community.
- TPAS Conference 2009 – Eileen has regrettably had to withdraw from attending this year's conference. Committee members were asked if they wished to attend the TPAS Conference in Dundee in early October. Sybil Watt and Evelyn Johnston expressed an interest in attending. It was agreed that anyone else who wished to be considered should contact Margaret by Monday 20 July.
- All Committee Members would like to wish David McLaren a speedy recovery.
- Sybil will chair the next meeting followed by Evelyn then Colin.

There was no further matters raised and the meeting closed at 7.55pm

Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 22 October 2009 at 7pm – Venue to be agreed

Chair – Sybil Watt