

WESLO TENANT PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the above meeting held on Thursday 22 October 2009 Bathgate Office at 7.00pm

Present from Weslo: Gillian McAllister, Acting Housing Manager
Margaret Walker, Admin Officer
June Harper, Housing Officer

Tenants:

Eileen Stirling – Tenant Director, Bathgate
Janette Wallace – Tenant Director, Stoneyburn
Evelyn Johnston – Livingston Station
Jim Porter - Bathgate
Hugh Ruck – Livingston
Kevin Symon, Broxburn
Sybil Watt – Bo'ness
Gordon Smith – Bo'ness

Scottish Housing Regulator:

Tom Burns - Inspector
Gordon Mason - Tenant Assessor
Esnat Mbisa - Tenant Assessor

1. Apologies for Absence:

David McLaren, Housing Manager
Andrew Sneddon – Tenant Director, Linlithgow
Alex Bow - Tenant Director, Bo'ness
Glen Mulligan - Fauldhouse
Colin Torrie – East Calder

2. Chair

After outlining the general housekeeping matters given our changed venue, Gillian McAllister welcomed Tom, Gordon and Esnat to the meeting. She then went on to invite Sybil Watt to chair the meeting.

3. Previous Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2009 were approved.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Older Persons Advisory Project (OPAP)

Gillian advised that to date on OPAP. To date there have been 83 home visits securing accumulated benefits of £131,413 for tenants; £11,801 of this was Housing Benefit.

This is a 3 year project and we have been working with Linkwide for almost 18 months. Gillian advised that she will be attending a presentation in November regarding rolling out an enhanced service. She also advised that Linkwide had been put forward for an award at the 2009 UK Housing Awards.

Post Meeting Note - In November the success of the project was recognised when they won the 2009 UK Housing Award for Outstanding Achievement in Housing in Scotland.

Evelyn advised that she had recently attended the Link Housing Conference where members of the OPAP team gave a presentation during which Weslo were mentioned for having embraced the project.

June advised that the feedback from tenants remains very positive.

6. Office Update

Margaret gave a brief progress report on work to date. The completion date has been extended by 1 week but it was hoped that staff will move back on 23 and 26 October. Margaret agreed to give a tour of the office to those interested at the end of the meeting.

7. Tenant Handbook

Gillian distributed 2 different bound copies of a proposed Tenant Handbook for consideration by the Committee.

At present new tenants receive this information in a loose format and David McLaren has been looking at bringing all the information together in a handbook. There was some early feedback provided:-

- Font size will have to be large enough for all tenants to be able to read - especially the elderly.
- Ensure that paper used is not glossy to minimise glare for those with sight problems.
- Ensure final document is available to all tenants.

As this was the groups' first sight of the Tenant Handbook, Gillian asked that they go away and provide any feedback/comments to any of the Weslo staff in attendance. These will be passed on to David.

8. TPAS Conference

Sybil, Colin and Hugh were accompanied by June to the TPAS Conference in Dundee. Once again all delegates reported a very interesting and stimulating conference.

June distributed a report on her experience at conference and specifically mentioned the workshop, '**Reducing the Risk of Sex Offending in our Communities**' by Judith McCullough. She found the topic and the subsequent discussions to be both controversial and emotive.

Sybil attended a workshop entitled "**Affordable rental housing: A Global Challenge**" presented by Professor Duncan MacLennan. While the workshop looked at the growing shortage of affordable rented housing and how this might be addressed by the development of a new housing policy for Scotland, she felt that she was a bit out of her depth. This did not deter her from making the most of meeting tenants from other areas and discussing how other landlords performed.

Hugh also attended the workshop by Professor MacLennan and while he felt it was academic, it was well presented. He also attended the Plenary session - "**The Scottish Housing Regulator – where's the tenant's voice?**" with John Jenkins. The session covered the role of the Regulator and Tenant involvement. He felt that this was a well presented, humorous presentation.

Margaret advised that Colin had provided a brief report for the Committee which summed up the weekend as being enjoyable and informative.

All agreed that this had once again been a great opportunity to meet new people and exchange ideas and they would welcome the opportunity to attend in 2010.

9. New Development

Gillian gave an update on the new developments. The 5 new build properties in Thornbridge Court, Falkirk, acquired from a private developer, have all been let and the tenants have settled in well to their new homes. The tenants in the flats are delighted with the standard of the properties. We have also taken over 24 flatted properties in Ravensbrae, Ladywell as part of our involvement with the West Lothian Strategic Alliance. 21 of these properties have been let and it is envisaged that the remaining 3 will be let in the next 2 weeks. Wherever possible these properties have been allocated to existing applicants on the West Lothian Common Housing Register. The Council will then be in a position to relet the resulting vacancy thereby assisting at least 2 applicants for one void. This is in line with a recent policy change at the Council in relation to allocation of new build properties.

Evelyn and Kevin both raised a question regarding the Right to Buy (RTB) in these properties given the recent press. Margaret explained that the draft Housing Bill proposes that any new property let on an SST after 25 June 2008 will be exempt from RTB. This means that any tenant whose tenancy started prior to the enactment would keep the right to buy under the modernised RTB. However, if they move without exercising their RTB and the house is let again after the start date; the new tenant would have no RTB entitlement over that property.

10. Weslo Initiatives

Gillian advised that Weslo Initiatives Ltd, the new subsidiary organisation of Weslo Housing Management became fully operational from 1 September 2009. Weslo Initiatives provide the management and letting function for sixteen mid-market rented properties at Millhaugh Lane, Bathgate.

11. Gas Service Policy Review

Margaret explained that we continue to experience difficulties gaining access to some properties to carry out the annual gas safety inspections. Our gas engineers are already making contact with tenants up to 2 months in advance of the due date to schedule inspections. We are looking to review the existing policy and procedure to ensure that we document all actions taken to obtain access and introducing a referral process to the Operations Director seeking approval to force entry to the property to carry out the service, cap the supply pipe or allow the service date to be exceeded.

It was agreed that the procedure would be issued to Committee members for comment and feedback.

12. Scottish Housing Regulator Inspection

Tom Burns gave a brief introduction to the Committee outlining the role the Scottish Housing Regulator in regard to regulation and inspection of Registered Social Landlords. He introduced the 2 tenant assessors - Gordon Mason (a tenant with Forth Housing Association) and Esnat Mbisa (a tenant with Glasgow Housing Association) - and explained that their role in the inspection process is to assess the organisation from a tenant perspective.

Tom then went on to brief the Committee on the forthcoming inspection.

He stressed that the whole process is designed to inspect the organisation:

- a) To champion and protect the interests of service users.
- b) To hold service providers to account.
- c) To help drive improvement in housing services, while making sure minimum standards are met and resources are used to best effect.
- d) To promote equal opportunities.
- e) To share good practice.
- f) To inform policy development and delivery.

In the course of the inspection they will look at 3 main areas –
Housing Management,
Asset management and responsive repairs, and
Leadership, governance and finance.

He outlined how they will carry out the inspection and who they will consult with during the process. It is envisaged that an inspector will be in contact with the committee members to assess their views on Weslo as a service provider.

At the end of the process Weslo will be awarded a grade based on their findings. Gradings are A – Excellent, B - Good, C - Fair and D – Poor. If the grading awarded for any particular service is C or D, then Weslo will be expected to agree an improvement plan that will be monitored and reviewed over a period of time.

The final report is provisionally due to be published in March 2010 and Weslo will be required to let tenants know when and where it is available.

Tom went on to explain that all the inspection reports undertaken are available on the SHR website at www.sccottishhousingregulator.gov.uk.

Margaret agreed to make copies of previous reports available to anyone who was interested in seeing what the report may look like. Sybill opened the session up for questions.

- Q. Hugh asked if the SHR is the first Regulator for housing.
- A. Tom explained that the Regulatory role was introduced in 2001 when it was recognised that there was a need for inspection in the sector and has changed 3 times since then.

- Q. Sybill asked the tenant assessors how they became involved.
- A. Gordon is currently Chairman of Forth Housing Association and Vice Chair of TPAS Scotland. As a tenant assessor with the Scottish Housing Regulator for the past 3 years, he helps to examine the quality of services provided by other social landlords from a tenant's point of view.

Esnat explained that she is a tenant with GHA and joined the tenant panel in June 2009 and was enjoying the experience so far. This will be her first inspection as a tenant assessor.

- Q. Margaret asked how frequently these inspections are carried out.
- A. Tom explained that as a fairly new RSL, Weslo will have a full inspection carried out this time. In future they will conduct a desk top risk based survey which might identify

a need for specific risk assessments. The Regulator is looking to work with other Regulatory bodies to develop tailored inspection processes.

- Q. June asked how many tenant assessors there were and what training was provided.
- A. The panel consists of 25 tenants but this number changes constantly. All are volunteers and all receive ongoing training. New panel members assessors begin their training shadowing some of the existing tenant assessors on inspections.
- Q. Evelyn asked what power does the regulator have – are they a “toothless tiger”?
- A. Tom explained that as the Inspection Reports are a matter of public record; many organisations do not welcome the adverse publicity of being awarded a poor grade. If the Regulator identifies poor governance in an organisation, they have the power to appoint someone to the Board, appoint a Manager or indeed take over the organisation. In Scotland there are instances where they have made appointees to work with the Board on an improvement plan but none have been taken over. There have been instances where RSL’s have merged in order to benefit from one another’s strengths.
- Q. June asked if the increased number of private landlords/lettings bodies will put pressure on to increase regulation.
- A. Tom explained that there is currently some regulation of the private rental sector but the draft housing bill may lead to more.
- Q. Margaret asked if Weslo’s Governance structure will impact on the inspection process.
- A. Tom advised that the inspectors will be looking at the service provision and it is to be expected that the outcomes will be the same.

Any Other Competent Business

- Margaret advised the group that the Tenant Participation Committee Constitution was due to be reviewed in November 2009. She distributed copies and suggested that this be considered further at the next meeting in January. This was agreed.
- Sybil asked that we record our best regards to David McLaren and all are glad that he is back to work.
- Evelyn suggested that we organise some sort of roadshow to promote the Tenant Participation Committee. This could be incorporated into a tour of the estates or by hosting an open day at the office. It was agreed that this would be worthwhile pursuing and it was agreed that Gillian, Margaret and June would take this forward and will be discussed again at the January 2010 meeting.
- Evelyn will chair the next meeting followed by Colin.

There was no further matters raised and the meeting closed at 9pm

Date of Next Meeting

**Thursday 28 January 2010 at 7pm in the Weslo Board Room.
Chair – Evelyn Johnston**

