

## WESLO TENANT PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

### Minutes of the above meeting held on Thursday 28 January 2010 Bathgate Office at 7.00pm

**Present from Weslo:** David McLaren, Housing Manager  
Gillian McAllister, Assistant Housing Manager  
Margaret Walker, Admin Officer

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

#### Action

#### 1. Apologies for Absence:

Evelyn Johnstone – Livingston Station  
Gordon Smith – Bo'ness  
Alex Bow – Tenant Director – Bo'ness  
June Harper, Housing Officer

#### 2. Chair

Evelyn Johnston was scheduled to chair the meeting however due to her absence Colin Torrie was next in line. Colin asked if Margaret Walker would chair the meeting on his behalf.

#### 3. Previous Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2009 were approved.

#### 4. Matters Arising

- a) **Office Update** – Margaret confirmed that the Bathgate office improvements had been completed and staff are very pleased with their new working environment.
- b) **Tenant Handbook** – David McLaren gave an update on progress. The text is undergoing a thorough edit before seeking the advice of the Plain English Society. We also plan to approach a design/printing company that can offer their expertise. Once this is completed the document will be referred back to the Committee for further consideration.
- c) **New Developments** – Margaret confirmed that the draft Housing Bill proposes any new property let on an SST after 25 June 2008 will be exempt from the Right to Buy.

DMcL

## 5. Older Persons Advisory Project (OPAP)

Gillian advised that to date there have been 96 home visits securing accumulated benefits of £173,749 for tenants – £17,921 of this is made up of Housing Benefit.

## 6. TPC Constitution Review

Margaret confirmed that this was introduced in 2006. Following the Housing Regulator's visit they suggested it may be appropriate to amend the constitution to offer more flexibility about the number of members that can sit on the TPC (currently 12 tenants plus staff). The Committee agreed this was sensible. It was also agreed the constitution should be amended to reflect the fact that the chair is rotated among the tenant members.

M Walker

## 7. Internet Update

Margaret gave a demonstration of the new BrowseAloud facility on our web page which was well received.

## 8. Housing Regulator Inspection

Margaret thanked those tenants who had met with the Regulator and confirmed that the Regulator's draft report is awaited.

## 9. Road Show / Estate Tour

David McLaren noted that there had been an earlier suggestion that we held a series of meetings for tenants to come along and meet members of the TPC. After some general discussion it was agreed this may not attract as much interest from tenants therefore it was agreed this idea should not be progressed further. Members were still keen to have an estate tour later in the year.

## 10. Proposed 2010/11 Rent Increase

David McLaren introduced the Finance Directors paper for consideration and comment in advance of it being presented to Weslo's Board on 3 February 2010.

The annual rent increase as set out in the Social Housing Agreement for the New Housing Partnership (NHP) houses is set at RPI using the 12 month RPI figure for November prior to the 1 April rent increase. The November 2009 12 month RPI index figure is 0.3%.

The base figure for inflation for all properties other than the NHP houses is also the 12 month RPI index with the most up to date figure being used. This index was chosen ahead of the 3 month index because it is less susceptible to short term price movements which can significantly affect the 3 month index. It is the same base figure as used for 2009/2010 and all other previous years. The most up to date measure of RPI is the December 2009 figure which is 2.4%.

11. Five scenarios were presented which indicate the effect of rent increases ranging from no increase to the maximum (RPI + 1%).

1. No increase
2. Increase by 1.0%
3. Increase by 2.0%
4. Increase by 3.0%
5. Increase by 3.4%

The effects of the five rent increase scenarios showed the weekly rent increases which ranged from zero to £1.95 per week.

The exception to this is the planned maintenance and improvement programme which each year is a one off and not repeated in subsequent years. For the 2011/2011 budget a total of £1,215,660 has been allocated to cover planned maintenance and improvement works. This is another year in which the company will make a major investment in the housing stock ensuring the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) is met by 2015. All five options show an operating deficit for 2010/11 of between £314,000 to £141,000. This in part is due to falling RTB Sales receipts combined with a higher level of programme spend compared to 2009/2010 and 2008/2009. No costs have been included for an office extension to the yard and a refurbishment to Bo'ness.

RPI has fluctuated more in the last 12 months than at any time in Weslo's history ranging from -1.6% to 2.4% and it is difficult to confidently predict how it will move throughout 2010/11. The Finance Directors recommendation to the Board would be to set a rent increase at the maximum figure of 3.4%. This will continue to strengthen the income stream thereby ensuring sufficient resources are in place to fund all necessary work to meet not only the SHQS by 2015 but ensure the Company has sufficient reserves to meet any other needs of the business.

A general discussion took place and the following members provided the undernoted feedback.

- Jim Porter said it was important to maintain the level of planned maintenance expenditure to comply with SHQS.
- Glen Mulligan acknowledged that given nearly 60% of our tenants were in receipt of Housing Benefit the increase would not significantly impact on all tenants.
- Sybil Watt thought the maximum £1.95 per week rise was not unreasonable.

The Committee members unanimously supported the recommendation that the maximum increase of 3.4% be applied

## **12. Rent Incentive Scheme**

David tabled a draft report on the introduction of a pilot Rent Incentive Scheme. The main aim is to encourage tenants to maintain a clear rent account.

There was a perception by some members about the likely success of trying to motivate non rent payers. The dilemma is about pitching the rewards to be large enough to act as an incentive but small enough to be cost effective. Members were asked to consider suitable incentives as report these to David McLaren.

It was agreed there would be no harm in introducing such a pilot scheme to ascertain its success or otherwise

## **13. Tenant Newspaper**

Copies of Glen Oaks Housing Association's tenant newsletter had been circulated in advance in order for members to consider its size, layout, style etc. The general consensus was that the document was easier to read, handle and size. It also lent itself well to illustrate articles particularly where photographs were used better than our tenant newspaper where it was thought due to the size of our newspaper it was too "wordy" and it was not eye catching enough.

M Walker

It was agreed that these comments would be taken on board and consideration would be given to establish the costs to produce our tenant newspaper in this style and format.

## **14. Estate Management Policy**

It has been agreed earlier that in future all Weslo policy procedures would be presented to the TPC for comment and approval. The Estate Management Policy had been in existence for some time but it was felt appropriate that this should be tabled for consideration.

Tenant members thought it a good idea if Housing Officers were to involve them in their estate inspection visits so that the tenants may be able to highlight hotspot or potential issues not necessarily known to the Housing Officer. It was also agreed it would be helpful if after the estate inspection a letter was issued to the tenants informing them of the issues identified and what action had been taken. A general discussion also took place about the merits of introducing a garden/balcony competition and this was considered to be a good idea which staff will consider further and report back in due course

DMcL

## **15. Void Relet Standard Policy**

David McLaren introduced this new policy that had been introduced following a recommendation by the Housing Regulator. The purpose of the policy is to explain the general standard that is required before re-letting. The policy was subsequently approved.

## **16. List of Policies due for Review**

The following policy procedures are due for review as follows:

Compulsory Participation by Owners in Maintenance Work  
Former Tenant Debt Recovery  
Tenant Allowances  
Owner Occupiers Annual Invoicing

The above are due for review in April and these will be discussed at the TPC meeting that month.

## **17. Dates of Future Meetings**

22 April 2010  
21 July 2010  
20 October 2010

## **18. Any Other Business**

David McLaren confirmed that it was our intention to rotate the attendance of Housing Officers at future TPC meetings. The Housing Officer will be accompanied by their Support Officer in order that the staff and TPC members get to know each other, staff can call upon the members as part of their plan to accompany them on their estate inspection process and give staff a greater understanding of the issues discussed at the TPC meetings. This suggestion was accepted by the tenant members.

Jim Porter mentioned that apparently 17 Weslo tenants throughout West Lothian had been fined by West Lothian Council because of their dogs fouling.

Evelyn will chair the next meeting followed by Colin.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

**Thursday 22 April 2010 at 7pm in the Weslo Boardroom.  
Chair – Evelyn Johnstone**