



## WESLO TENANT PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

### Minutes of the above meeting held on Thursday 30 September 2010 Bathgate Office at 7.00pm

**Present from Weslo:** Mike Bruce, Chief Executive  
Gillian McAllister, Assistant Housing Manager  
Margaret Walker, Admin Officer  
Donna Jack, Housing Officer, Bo'ness

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

1. **Apologies for Absence**

David McLaren, Housing Manager  
Susan Anderson, Estates Manager, Bo'ness  
Alex Bow – Tenant Director, Bo'ness  
Gordon Smith – Bo'ness

**Action**

2. **Introduction**

Gillian McAllister welcomed Andy Hilditch to the meeting and introduced him to the committee members before inviting Glenn to chair the meeting.

3. **Previous Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 July were approved by Eileen Stirling and seconded by Janette Wallace.

4. **Matters Arising**

- a) **Tenant Handbook** – Margaret circulated a sample copy of the agreed handbook and invited feedback. It was agreed that the handbook reflects the draft previously discussed and agreed.

**Post meeting Note:** It is expected that the handbook will be issued to tenants mid October.

- b) **Older Persons Advisory Project (OPAP)** – Gillian advised that 136 tenants had now been contacted and accumulated benefits of £221,659.44 had been awarded of which £25,384.39 was housing benefit.

Evelyn Johnstone asked if the service was still only available to over 60's. She had received a letter but is not 60. Evelyn to check who sent the letter and contact Gillian McAllister to investigate if the letter had been issued by OPAP or any other agency offering similar advice.

EJ/GMcA

## 5. Policy Procedure Reviews

The procedure was issued prior to the meeting.

### a) Tenant Participation Policy

Gillian explained that this policy outlines Weslo's ongoing commitment to Tenant Participation. Committee members recognise that Weslo will support the development of individual Tenant Associations should there be a demand. They also acknowledge that we seek feedback from service users wherever possible. However, Glenn commented that there are a large number of tenants who may not have the opportunity to comment and that staff should take the opportunity to make courtesy visits where they get the chance to do so.

Mike Bruce explained that we were looking at different methods of conducting tenant surveys and promoting the e-mail register  
Policy approved.

## 6. Housing Benefit E-Forms

Glenn invited Andy to make his presentation on the introduction of new software that allows housing benefit and council tax applicants to complete applications online.

The council anticipates an increase in the number of applications while having fewer staff administering the scheme; it is envisaged that this package will speed up the application process and be less staff intensive.

Applicants will be able to make new applications and advise any change in circumstances at [www.westlothian.gov.uk](http://www.westlothian.gov.uk).

A number of new Weslo tenants have been involved in testing the system in the Bathgate office and the feedback has been very positive.

Glenn thanked Andy for taking time to come along and talk to the committee.

## 7. Repairs


### 1. Weslo Web Site

Gillian advised that the recent regulatory report made comment that the tenant assessors found part of the repairs section of the website confusing. She asked the committee members to review the content again and tell us what they thought. The consensus was that the information contained on the web site was easily understood and the tenants did not find it confusing. Glenn pointed out that this group had reviewed the web site and its content approximately 12 months ago and they didn't feel that there was any need to make further changes. Several tenants also pointed out that they met with the tenant assessors during the inspection period and the assessors were advised that they were happy with Weslo as a landlord. It was suggested that the regulator be invited to the next TPC meeting to further discuss his points.

### 2. Multi Trade Lines

Gillian explained that it is sometimes necessary to issue what is referred to as a multi trade line e.g. to replace a bath we issue a line to a plumber, electrician, joiner and possibly a plasterer. We do not refer to this on the web site but should we? After

GMCA

some discussion, it was felt that more information may lead to confusion. It was suggested that we look at the use of a pop up box being added to the website and opened when the symbol  is clicked on as demonstrated in the council e-forms. As the regulator's comments mainly related to clarity surrounding multi-trade jobs, Kevin suggested that the layout of the page detailing the response times may be improved by inserting an additional space between the various categories and use of another colour differentiating between the groupings.

GMcA

### **3. Repairs Reporting Guide**

Margaret had circulated the booklet in advance of the meeting to give tenants the opportunity to consider its contents. Tenants reported that they found the booklet interesting and would recommend its distribution to all tenants. It was agreed that we would look at the cost implications before making a decision.

DMcL

Margaret showed the group another RSL website where tenants have the opportunity to log their repairs via the website. To assist tenants identify the exact repair the website has diagrams similar to those included in the booklet. Once again the tenants felt that this would be a useful addition to the website but they did comment that this method of reporting repairs was not accessible by all tenants.

## **8. Scottish Social Housing Charter**

A Question & Answer sheet was issued in advance outlining how the Government was planning to develop the Charter which will in the future be used to measure the performance of landlords throughout the country. It is important that tenants take the opportunity to have their say. Margaret explained that more information was available on the Scottish Government website [www.housingcharter.gov.uk](http://www.housingcharter.gov.uk).

Margaret advised that West Lothian Council were holding a Tenant Information Day on Saturday 16 October at the Civic Centre, Livingston between 10.30 & 2.30. Committee members were welcome to go along where they would be able to learn more about the Charter.

West Lothian Council will also be holding meeting with the West Lothian Housing Network on Tuesday 15 February 2011 where they will be discussing the Charter. If anyone would like to attend please let Margaret know.

Margaret will be attending a Charter presentation on Thursday 21 October in Wishaw where there will be presentations by members of the Scottish Governments Charter Team, North Lanarkshire Council and the Scottish Housing Regulator. We are able to take a tenant along and if anyone would like to accompany Margaret, please let her know by Monday 4 October.

## **9. Improvement Plan**

Mike informed the group that in response to the Regulators Inspection report we have submitted a draft Improvement Plan identifying how we intend to respond to the areas of concern raised in the report. He assured those present that the proposals would not affect service delivery. Some of the things being considered include establishing a method of monitoring and reporting on our customer care standards and the introduction of touch pads in reception areas to assess customer feedback. Once the Improvement Plan has been approved by Weslo's Board and the Regulator it will become a standing order at TPC meetings, will be reported on in the Tenant News on a 6-monthly basis, a summary will be included on the website and staff will be updated via the intranet.

## 10. Chief Executive Q & A Session

**Q. Janette** The UK government is keen to look at the types of tenancies on offer in the social rented sector. They are keen to remove the notion that a social rented property is a home for life and may restrict it to a 5 year period where it will be reviewed.

How do you feel this would impact on

- 1) tenants maintaining properties, and
- 2) Weslo as a landlord? Q Types of tenancies

**A** This is an English idea which is unlikely to impact on Scotland where the Scottish Government is through Firm Foundations, promoting mixed tenure estates. Such a concept would also cut across the principles contained in the Scottish Secure tenancy. It is not considered a risk and has not been added to Weslo's risk register.

**Q. Janette** With the implementation of the new Housing Bill, the Scottish Government is looking to replace the Scottish Housing Regulator. Do you have any idea of what the new Regulator's responsibilities might be, and what effect will it have on Weslo?

**A.** The draft Housing Bill proposed a new housing regulator for Scotland. Weslo commented that a Regulator was necessary to satisfy both tenant and lenders needs. As a company, Weslo will be happy if future regulation is independent, risk based and proportionate. One cause for concern is the suggestion that landlords should have to pay for regulation. We assessed that it cost – in staff time - approx £20,000 to prepare for inspection, so we should not be expected to pay the inspectors costs in addition to bear such heavy burdens on the time of our staff in preparing for these visits.

**Q. Jim** There is a lot of speculation on the government proposals to cut housing benefit. Has Weslo given any thought to how that will impact on Weslo's income and rent setting for the future? What about tenant mobility?

**A.** The proposed changes will impact on Weslo - increasing financial pressures on tenants could lead to increased rent arrears. In the past we have looked at introducing a rent incentive scheme, it may be appropriate to reconsider this.

**Q Eileen** The government are increasing the rate of VAT from 17.5% to 20% from January 2011. This will inevitably increase Weslo's costs. Will this have any direct impact on tenants now or in the future?

**A** Weslo invests approx £1m per annum on capital costs. The increase in vat will add approx £25,000 a year to our programme costs. On the reactive side, perhaps another £15,000 will impact on the costs of material, so all in all we estimate the increase will impact to the tune of approximately £40,000. To place this in context, Mike reminded the group that we currently held cash reserves in excess of £1m, so he was not expecting these increases to impact on tenants.

**Q. Glenn** Radical changes in welfare benefits are being proposed to "encourage mobility" and to reduce dependency on the benefits system. This may lead to tenants having to pay rent, where previously they did not. What impact is this likely to have on Weslo?

**A.** These proposals could impact hugely on Weslo tenants but more detail on the proposals is needed and these will be announced on 20 October.

**Q. Hugh** In the past it has been suggested that Weslo consider installing radiator deflector in an effort to reduce energy costs. Has their been any decision taken on this matter?

**A.** Current central heating contracts already include the installation of reflectors on radiators installed on external walls. Weslo's Technical Manager is looking to establish if there are any grants available that would allow us to fit reflectors to the remaining properties. We will provide an update at the next meeting.

**Q Hugh** I appreciate that Weslo has installed replacement door, windows and kitchens in its properties. Weslo has not had any programme for sanitary ware renewals; is there any plans to include this in future planned maintenance programmes as many of the systems are over 30 years old?

**A.** Achieving the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015 is a priority and all our planned maintenance contracts have been planned to meet this objective. At present, all of our properties comply with the SHQS relating to sanitary ware therefore we will not be able to program renewals before 2015. Following the recent tenant satisfaction survey, we are aware that replacement sanitary ware is high on tenants list of priorities and are considering introducing a voluntary improvement scheme for bathrooms.

**Q. Glenn** What priority will Weslo give to Armed Forces personnel seeking housing?

**A.** We are currently reviewing our Allocation Policy and it is unclear how Armed Forces personnel will be dealt with at this time. Margaret will check out the Council position and report back. **Post Meeting Note** – West Lothian Council's Allocation Policy recognises the housing needs of Forces personnel and those who do not have housing and who are seeking housing in West Lothian can make an application and the Needs assessment will determine their points. They are generally given priority points as they are classified as homeless.

## 11. Any other Business

Tenant Newspaper – Margaret asked if the revamped Tenant News met the expectations of the group as discussed at an earlier meeting. Everyone confirmed that they found the format easier to read and the content was informative.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 9.20pm.

### Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 20 January 2011 at 7pm in the Weslo Boardroom.

Chair – Jim Porter