



WESLO TENANT PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the above meeting held on Thursday 20 January 2011 Bathgate Office at 7.00pm

Present from Weslo: David McLaren, Housing Manager
Margaret Walker, Admin Officer
Jessie McCue, Housing Officer, Bathgate
Pamela Menzies, Housing Support Officer, Bathgate

Tenants: Hugh Ruck – Tenant Director, Livingston
Eileen Stirling – Tenant Director, Bathgate
Glen Mulligan - Fauldhouse
Jim Porter - Bathgate
Sybil Watt – Bo'ness

1. Apologies for Absence

Action

Gillian McAllister, Assistant Housing Manager
Alex Bow – Tenant Director, Bo'ness
Janette Wallace – Tenant Director, Stoneyburn
Evelyn Johnstone – Livingston Station
Gordon Smith – Bo'ness
Colin Torrie - East Calder

2. Introduction

David McLaren welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Jessie McCue, Housing Officer and Pamela Menzies, Housing Support Officer who will attend committee meetings for the coming year and attend this years TPAS annual conference. Jim Porter was then invited to chair the meeting..

3. Previous Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2010 were approved by Hugh Ruck and seconded by Sybil Watt.

4. Matters Arising

- a) **Older Persons Advisory Project (OPAP)** – David advised that this had been an extremely successful scheme that had attracted in excess of £235,000 additional benefit to Weslo tenants over the past 30 months. This project was to run for three years and funding expires at the end of March 2011. Linkwide who deliver the service on behalf of its partners, including Weslo, is looking for future funding to continue the scheme.
- b) **Repairs Reporting Guide** – Margaret thanked everyone for their contributions regarding the booklet. This is being circulated amongst staff for comment before a decision is made whether to issue to tenants. Margaret also pointed out that we were exploring other options to assist repair reporting.

- c) **Scottish Social Housing Charter** – Margaret briefly reported on the Charter presentation hosted by North Lanarkshire Council on 21 October. She also highlighted a briefing paper produced by the Chartered Institute of Housing which members might find useful. This is available at www.cih.org/scotland/policy/CharterPaper-Nov10.pdf (copy enclosed with minutes)

5. **Bathroom Updates**

David advised that the recent tenant satisfaction survey identified high demand for new bathrooms to be installed in properties. As previously discussed, achieving the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by 2015 is a priority therefore our programme of planned maintenance has been developed to ensure that we comply with the standards. As all of our properties have sanitary ware that is serviceable and meets the SHQS standard, we will not be able to offer any improvements before 2015.

In recognition of the tenant demand we are exploring the introduction of a voluntary improvement package where tenants pay a monthly charge similar to the scheme operated when replacement kitchens were installed.

Estimated costs show that a bathroom costing £2,000 would cost tenants £25 per month over 10 years. This charge would be eligible for housing benefit and it is anticipated that the charge would fall if Weslo installed bathrooms under a future planned programme on the estates.

Glenn queried the timing of introducing such a scheme at this time. He was of the opinion that sanitary ware replacements should be included in the post 2015 planned maintenance programmes.

Sybil pointed out that her bathroom is the original suite and is approx 40 years old. She cannot afford to fit a new bathroom but this scheme would enable her to benefit now.

6. **Improvement Plan**

It was explained by David advised that the Regulatory Improvement Plan has been approved by the regulator. The plan includes 31 items that Weslo require to address. He gave two examples:-

Antisocial Behaviour Policy – this is being revised to incorporate a survey to be undertaken when the case has been closed. Complainants will be given the opportunity to tell us how they felt about the process rather than the outcome of the complaint.

Complaints Procedure – complainants will be invited to tell us what they thought about the processes (in a similar vein to the antisocial complaints).

Once these changes are implemented the responses will be analysed monthly and reported to the Operations Director.

7. 2011/2012 Planned Maintenance Programme

David advised that the 2011/2012 programme will be presented to the Board on 2 February, 2011. The proposed programme expenditure is in the region of £1.2m and is driven by SHQS requirements. Proposed programme includes:-

- replacement roofs in West Calder and Livingston Station,
- 137 replacement heating systems,
- External painting,
- Installation of ventilators and extractor fans,
- Electrical Inspections & kitchen socket upgrades.

8. Rent Increase 2011/2012

Our proposed rent increase for 2011/2012 will be presented by the Finance Director to Weslo's Board on 2 February 2011.

David outlined the annual rent increase is 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 2010 prior to the 1 April rent increase. The November 2010 RPI figure is 4.7%.

The base figure for inflation for all properties other than the NHP houses is the 12 month RPI December 2010 which is 4.8%.

Seven scenarios will be presented which indicate the effect of rent increases ranging from a zero increase to the maximum (RPI + 1%) of 5.8%.

Glenn asked what increase was being recommended and David advised that it will be a matter for the Board. The Finance Director is aware of the difficult times faced by our tenants; wage settlements not matching inflation, people receiving no wage rise and or being paid off so is conscious of whatever rise implemented will impact on affordability. Nevertheless, the company is experiencing increases in material costs, VAT rise etc and having to absorb these costs. He is likely to recommend a rent increase between 4 - 5%.

Hugh pointed out that a recent Inside Housing article reported that landlords in England & Wales were expected to apply increases of approximately 6.8%.

- A general discussion took place and the following members provided the undernoted feedback.
Jim Porter said it was a very difficult decision and the Board will have to consider how it will affect tenants - too high could lead to increased levels of rent arrears. The Board must try to reach middle ground in the knowledge that not everyone will be happy.
- Eileen Stirling is confident that tenants are aware that some increases are necessary to deliver the services they expect to receive.
- Glen Mulligan stated that in principal a rise between 4 & 5% would be acceptable. He suggested that if an increase below RPI +1% is approved we must make sure that when we advise tenants of the increase we make sure to tell them that there was scope to apply a larger increase and the reason for not doing so.
- Sybil Watt felt that an increase of 5% was acceptable in the current climate.

D McL

Following a request for feedback in our December 2010 newspaper, we received only one response. The respondent asked that any rent increase should be a reasonable given the current financial climate.

9. Any other Business

Glenn

Can Weslo speak to the council to arrange to have excess grit removed from footpaths?

Jim Porter, who is a council warden, was able to advise that as more snow is forecast over the next few weeks the council is leaving the grit to provide some protection for pedestrians in the event of a snow fall or ice. It was agreed that the grit was an improvement on the whin dust used in 2010.

Sybil

Sybil asked for an update on the situation re fences and walls in the Kinneil Estate.

David advised that we were pursuing Falkirk Council on this matter. Existing safety measures are robust and are checked periodically by staff.

Can I install an external light?

An alteration / Improvement form will be issued and we will explore if there is any Home Security scheme operating in Bo'ness.

D McL

Margaret

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 continued to be informative.

Dates for next meeting –

Margaret proposed dates for the next 3 meetings which were agreed. These are:-

Thursday 21 April 2011

Thursday 14 July 2011

Thursday 13 October 2011.

Policy Reviews

There are a number of policies due for review in March 2011. As there are no changes proposed, we are looking for agreement to adopt the policies as they are for a further 2 years. This was agreed.

The policies concerned are:-

Tenant with Vulnerable Issues,
Abandoned properties,
Right to Repair Scheme,
Right to Compensation for Improvements,
Rechargeable Repairs Policy,
Estate Management Policy.

Five policies will be brought to the next meeting for discussion, these are:-

Allocation Policy,
Single to Joint Tenancy,
Antisocial Behaviour Policy,
Antisocial Behaviour Orders Policy,
Antisocial Behaviour & Neighbour Disputes.

Housing(Scotland)Act 2011

Margaret advised that the new Act will be enforced from 1 March 2011.

CloH

2011 membership fees are now due and Margaret sought clarification that the committee members wanted their subscriptions to be renewed.

Jim

Jim asked if Weslo staff could report any potholes they find on the estates to West Lothian Council.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 9.05pm.

Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 21 April, 2011 at 7pm in the Weslo Boardroom.

Chair – Hugh Ruck