

WESLO TENANT PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

**Minutes of the above meeting held on Thursday 14 May 2008
in the Bathgate Office at 7.00pm**

Present from Weslo:

Mike Bruce, Chief Executive
David McLaren, Housing Manager
Margaret Walker, Admin Officer
June Harper, Housing Officer
Gregor Colville, Graduate Trainee

Tenants:

Hugh Ruck – Tenant Director, Livingston
Eileen Stirling – Tenant Director, Bathgate
Janette Wallace – Tenant Director, Stoneyburn
Glenn Mulligan – Fauldhouse
Jim Porter, Bathgate
Colin Torrie – East Calder
Sybil Watt – Bo'ness

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Andrew Sneddon - Tenant Director, Linlithgow
Margaret Colquhoun – Whitburn
Evelyn Johnston - Livingston Station
Margaret Paterson, Whitburn
Gordon Smith - Bo'ness

2. CHAIR

David invited Jim Porter to chair the meeting.

3. PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2008 were approved.

4. MATTERS ARISING

(a) COMMON HOUSING REGISTER

Nothing further to report.

(b) TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

David confirmed that no amendments were received following the last meeting. He thanked the committee for their involvement and advised that he will take this forward.

(c) **LEVEL 2 CERTIFICATE IN HOUSING**

Eileen Stirling, Janette Wallace and Colin Torrie attended the first of 4 training days earlier this month. They have all reported that the first day was enjoyable.

David reiterated that Weslo would assist with any additional help or research facilities needed e.g. use of internet.

5. ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR NEXT 2 MEETINGS

Jim invited nominations for committee members to Chair the next two meetings. It was agreed that Eileen would chair the meeting on 14 August and Janette would chair meeting on 6 November (**please note change of date**).

6. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY

At the February meeting Eileen Stirling, Jim Porter, Colin Torrie and Janette Wallace all expressed an interest in being involved in the Equalities Action Planning Group. After due consideration, it was felt that given the size of the group, only 2 tenants would be required. After some discussion, Colin and Jim withdrew and Eileen and Janette agreed to join the group.

Margaret will advise Mike Crozier and arrange for an invitation to be sent for the next meeting which is due to be held late July/early August.

7. TPAS CONFERENCE 2008

Nominations were sought for delegates to attend the TPAS Annual Conference at the Apex Hotel, Dundee on 24 – 26 October, 2008.

It was agreed that Janette, Colin and Sybil would attend.

Margaret will make the necessary arrangements with TPAS

8. TENANT MEMBERSHIP OF CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF HOUSING

David McLaren advised the committee that from January this year, the Chartered Institute of Housing is offering a Tenant Membership package. The committee all felt that this would be a useful resource to keep up to date with housing matters.

Colin Torrie, Eileen Stirling and Janette Wallace will get free membership for 1 year as they are undertaking the Level 2 Certificate in Housing training.

The Tenant Directors also currently receive a copy of the Inside Housing magazine weekly.

Margaret will check who is currently registered with the Executive Assistant and arrange memberships as appropriate.

9. CYCLE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Margaret pointed out that we have no dates agreed for future meetings. While these meetings have taken place on Thursday evenings, this is flexible and can be changed if the committee felt it appropriate. It was agreed to continue with quarterly Thursday evening meetings at 7pm.

Margaret proposed the following dates that were agreed:-

Thursday 14 August

Thursday 6 November (please note 6th not 7th)

Thursday 22 January (please note 6th not 7th)

Thursday 16 April

10. QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION WITH MIKE BRUCE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Jim introduced Mike and invited questions.

Q. Hugh asked Mike what his thoughts were on the recent announcement that the Government will look to make £200m available to first time home owners and the redevelopment of derelict properties.

A. Mike confirmed that this announcement referred to draft legislation for England. Scotland will benefit from new funding proposals contained in the green paper – Firm Foundations. Mike welcomed the proposals and pointed out that Weslo’s response to the green paper is available on the web site at www.weslo-housing.co.uk, under News & Views.

Q. Glenn asked if Weslo had any plans to incorporate replacement / renewal of fencing of estates into the Planned Maintenance Program.

A. Mike confirmed that we have looked at establishing a standard for replacement fencing previously. However, at this time our priorities lie in ensuring that we carry out work to ensure compliance with the SHQS. Weslo continue to effect reactive maintenance repairs where necessary to boundary fences.

Q. Hugh asked what development proposals Weslo are looking at.

A. Mike reminded the committee that Weslo is one of the four West Lothian based social landlords who have joined together to form the West Lothian Strategic Alliance. The Alliance aims to build 600 new affordable homes for rent – 20% will come to Weslo, 40% to Almond Housing Association and 40% to the West Lothian Housing Partnership. Mike outlined some of the difficulties the Alliance has experienced recently but they continue to look to identifying potential sites for development.

In West Lothian, Weslo is currently looking at potential new build sites at Ellen Street, Whitburn and Fauldhouse Cricket Club. In Bo’ness we are looking at two possible sites, at Douglas Road and one in Grahamsdyke. There is also the possibility of a development project in Airdrie which we are currently considering.

Q. Jim asked if Weslo felt that West Lothian Council is attempting to retain the main share of development potential for themselves.

A. People are aware that the Council has embarked on a development program - building houses for rent. Other housing providers can see the impact this is having on their development plans. Since Communities Scotland was disbanded in April, development funding has passed to the Scottish Government. We will continue to work with the local authority to identify development opportunities.

Q. Jim asked if the current Council Allocation Policy meant that the nominations to Weslo do not always provide acceptable tenants and what difficulties does this create.

A. Mike advised that as an RSL we are required, under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, to accept Section 5 referrals from the LA to assist in homelessness. The grounds for refusing such a referral is very narrow and does not seem to include management reasons – an omission which has potential for trouble in the future. We are not able to take account of the nominees past housing history. This has created difficulties, for example we have been asked to house a former tenant who was evicted and owed Weslo approx £6,000; another nominee had a history of anti-social behaviour and drug dependency who was nominated for a block of flats where there already existed a number of management issues therefore it did not make sense to add to an existing problem. So far we have been able to negotiate with the Council and will continue to do so if problems arise and we are monitoring the Section 5 referrals on a monthly basis.

We are also looking to establish a Protocol with the Council which we hope will clarify the situation.

Mike pointed out that while we work within existing legislation, this does not mean that the legislation cannot be open to interpretation or challenge. As an example he cited the need for landlords to consult with their tenants on the Rent Policy. Mike is currently looking to establish a policy to present to Weslo's June Board for approval but is finding it difficult to establish how we might take account of tenant views. As a stock transfer landlord; tenants in West Lothian were given a rent guarantee of a maximum increase of inflation + 1% per annum whereas tenants in Falkirk have the same guarantee for 30 years. The houses built under New Housing Partnership funding regime have a guarantee of no more than inflation in perpetuity. Consequently, where landlords have pre-existing contractual obligations there remains a danger that the present legislation may raise tenants' expectations unrealistically.

Q. Sybil made the point that a member of Edinburgh Council housing staff said, "given the access to private accommodation, bed & breakfast etc. there should be no need for anyone to be homeless". What is Mike's view on this statement and how many houses do we keep for homelessness?

A. The Government is committed to eradicating homelessness by 2012 and aims to give all homeless persons the right to permanent accommodation. This is not necessarily achievable.

Most RSL's have what is called a 50/50 Nomination Arrangement with the local authority; this means that they seek a nomination from the council for every other vacancy. In the past, Weslo allowed 5% of its houses in each estate to be used to assist the Council with homelessness but as we are now

allocating via the Common Housing Register in West Lothian then generally only those in priority need are being nominated.

Q. Glen asked if Weslo is being kept up to date with the Strathclyde Home Development adjacent to Crofffoot Drive.

A. Mike was aware that there were some difficulties with contractors attempting to take access over a strip of land in our ownership and steps have been taken to stop this.

As there were no further questions Mike asked the committee what they thought about Weslo conducting another Tenant Satisfaction survey. The last survey was carried out by 4Eighty in 2005. A new survey may look at different areas of the service we provide. There was general agreement that this was a good idea and Mike agreed to take this suggestion away for consideration towards the end of the year.

Mike asked what the committee thought about the new Board/ training facilities. There was very positive feedback from the committee members.

Eileen passed on the positive comments made by Alan Smith (tutor for Level 2 training) about Weslo's web site. Mike was pleased to hear about this and will pass on the comments to the appropriate staff. He also mentioned that we were planning to review the web site but this has been delayed due to staffing issues.

ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

There was no matter raised and the meeting closed at 8 pm.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 14 August, 2008 at 7pm - 66 North Bridge Street, Bathgate