WESLO TENANT PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the above meeting held on Thursday 7 February 2008
in the Bathgate Office at 7.00pm

Present from Weslo: David McLaren, Housing Manager
Margaret Walker, Admin Officer

Tenants: Andrew Sneddon - Tenant Director, Linlithgow
Eileen Stirling –Tenant Director, Bathgate
Hugh Ruck – Tenant Director, Livingston
Janette Wallace – Tenant Director, Stoneyburn
Jim Porter, Bathgate
Margaret Paterson, Whitburn
Colin Torrie – East Calder
Glenn Mulligan – Fauldhouse
Gordon Smith - Bo'ness

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

June Harper, Housing Officer
Sybil Watt – Bo'ness
Evelyn Johnston - Livingston Station
Margaret Colquhoun – Whitburn

Margaret informed the group that Helen Symon had tendered her resignation from the committee.

2. CHAIR

David invited Andrew Sneddon to chair the meeting.

3. PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November, 2007 were approved.

4. MATTERS ARISING

(a) **Common Housing Register**

David informed the group that the Common Housing Register is now operational and that Janice Gray, Weslo's Lettings Officer, is currently seconded to West Lothian Council for a pilot period of 6 months to assist in the operation of the Register which is administered jointly by West Lothian Council, Almond Housing Association and Weslo.

5. TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

The final edits have been incorporated into the strategy. A copy was added to the website following the November meeting inviting comment. Tenants were also invited to comment on the strategy in the December Tenant News. We are unable to advise how many tenants have viewed the document but no feedback has been received.

David will issue the final version to committee members and requested that any further comments should be passed to him within 10 days.

6. LEVEL 2 CERTIFICATE IN HOUSING

Eileen Stirling, Janette Wallace, Margaret Paterson and Colin Torrie are all interested in participating in this training. David McLaren will make the necessary arrangements with the CIH and be in touch with those wishing to participate.

Jim Porter advised he already has the Level 2 Certificate but he would be interested if Weslo were able to offer Level 3 or 4.

David confirmed that Weslo would assist with any additional help or research facilities needed e.g. use of internet. He also advised that new staff in Weslo had recently benefited from a training course entitled – "An introduction to housing". This had been positively received and David undertook to consider extending this to the Tenant Participation Committee.

7. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY

Margaret explained that Weslo has recently set up a staff group to develop an Equalities Action Plan. The objectives include:-

- Establish a database of equalities information to include race, sex, age and disability.
- Promotion of Equalities Plan.
- Establish an advisory group of special needs representatives.
- Improve quality of information to customers.

Several committee members advised that they had some previous experience of this subject and accepted that there was a requirement on Weslo to hold such information on tenants. Margaret went on to ask if any committee members were interested in being involved in the Equalities Action Planning Group.

Eileen Stirling, Jim Porter, Colin Torrie and Janette Wallace all expressed an interest

Post meeting Note – If any other committee member who was not at the meeting is interested, please contact Margaret on 01506 639121 to discuss further.

8. ESTATE MANAGEMENT RESTRUCTURE

David advised the committee that Weslo had amalgamated the Estates and Lettings Departments in Bathgate to create an Estates Team that is fit for purpose in tackling the issues/need many tenants have today. Gillian McAllister, Senior Housing Officer has been appointed to lead the team and will report directly to David as Housing Manager. Gillian took up her post from 1 February. The merger will see each Housing Officer being assisted by a Housing Support Assistant and Admin staff.

Post meeting Note – Changes in areas will be effective from Monday 18 February and the areas of responsibility are as follows:-

Senior Housing Officer - Gillian McAllister Housing Support Officer - Linda Kesson
Areas -
Bathgate Belvedere, Dalling Avenue, Falside, Millhaugh Lane and Whiteside.

Housing Officer - June Harper Housing Support Officer - Robert Bennett
Areas -
Addiebrownhill, Addiewell, Armadale, Bathgate Kirkton & Race Road, Stoneyburn, Livingston Dedridge.

Housing Officer - Jessie McCue Housing Support Officer - Pamela Menzies
Areas -
Blackburn, Broxburn, East Calder, Kirknewton, Livingston Station, Mid Calder Pumpherston, Uphall, West Calder, Winchburgh.

Housing Officer - Liz Weir Housing Support Officer - John Rankine
Areas -
Whitburn, Polbeth, Fauldhouse

9. AOCB

(a) TPAS Conference 2008

Margaret informed the committee that the TPAS Annual Conference will take place at the Apex Hotel, Dundee on 24 – 26 October, 2008.

We will be happy to consider requests from committee members to attend and those interested in attending should let Margaret know on by the end of February.

(b) Annual Rent Increase

David informed the group that the Board had approved a 5.3% increase from 1 April 2008.
He explained that this is the maximum increase allowed i.e. inflation + 1% (based on Nov 07 RPI figures). He went on to explain the various options discussed by the Board and informed the committee of the impending increases by local authorities and other RSL's operating in this area. Letters will be issued at the end of February. There followed a discussion on the financial impact on landlords striving to meet the SHQS by 2015.

(c) Improvement Works

David explained that the £1.4m Improvement Programme for 2008 was approved by the Board on 6 February. The programme will help reflect the maintenance issues required to ensure that we comply with the SHQS by 2015.

(d) Homestake

David informed the committee that in conjunction with our funders – the Dunfermline Building Society – we have developed a Homestake Scheme. It is hoped that jointly we will be able to assist approximately 15 applicants become home owners. The purchaser will become the outright owner of the property and Weslo's funding will be secured on the property as a second charge which will be repayable on the sale of the property.

He went on to explain that we continue to be involved with Dunfermline BS to provide a savings scheme which allows tenants and their family members to operate a savings scheme which attracts higher interest. There is also a facility to borrow after a period of time at a competitive interest rate. The take up of this scheme to date has been disappointing with only 2 applicants to date.

(e) Impact of benefit / hsg benefit & repossession

Eileen Stirling raised concerns over the Housing Minister, Caroline Flint's announcement that "**council tenants** who do not work should seek employment or face losing their homes".
Eileen's concerns were that the Housing Minister was not considering the position of those with long term physical or mental health problems who were not in a position to work. It was pointed out that Caroline Flint is the English Housing Minister. David in his opinion did not consider her remark would be widely supported in Scotland.

(f) Gas AV Appointment System

Hugh Ruck wished to register his appreciation of the Gas engineers appointment system which he feels is a great idea.

(g) Rent Increase – Direct Debit

Colin Torrie sought clarification of how Direct Debits for rent would be updated to reflect the rent increases. David advised that Direct Debits will be done by staff however anyone paying by standing order will need to instruct their Bank to increase the payments. The increase letter will explain this.

In closing David thanked Andrew Sneddon for chairing the meeting and looks forward to inviting Jim Porter to chair the next meeting on Thursday 15 May.

Meeting closed at 8.50

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday15 May, 2008 at 7pm - 66 North Bridge Street, Bathgate