

JOINT CONSULTATION MEETING
Between
ST LEGER HOMES of DONCASTER
And
THE STANDING JOINT COMMITTEE
Of the
DONCASTER FEDERATION of the TENANTS and RESIDENTS
ASSOCIATIONS
Held on
23rd February 2006 at 2.00pm
In the
HAYWOOD ROOM

PRESENT

ST LEGER HOMES

Mr M Musgrave Chief Executive – St Leger Homes of Doncaster
Mr P Hopkinson Director of Property Services
Mrs J Clarke Customer Services Manager
Mrs G Harris Public Relations Assistant
Mrs L Chamberlain Community Liaison Officer
Mrs V Binks Compact & Diversity Assistant

STANDING JOINT COMMITTEE

Mrs L Ralph SJC Chair
Mrs M Hood Secretary
Mrs S Wilkinson Treasurer
Mr F Knapton Assis Secretary
Mr K Millington
Mr S Hall
Mr G Hardy
Mr B Naughton
Ms L Teasdale
Mrs D Ashmore

1: APOLOGIES

Mrs M Williams Vice Chair
Mr M Soloman Vice Treasurer
Ms L Myers
Mrs L Milan Customer Relations & Marketing Manager
Mr K Miller Director of Housing (interim)
Ms S Bowie Community Liaison Manager

2: Minutes of Last Meeting

Lyn Ralph opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

The minutes from the last meeting were agreed as a true record.

3: Matters Arising

Linda Teasdale enquired about information given at the previous meeting, relating to Stores. Operatives will in future be provided with basic parts, in order to save them time, leaving the job and driving backwards and forwards to collect relevant parts from the Stores. Lyn Ralph explained that there used to be a courier service to supply operatives with parts. Martin Musgrave informed the meeting that he has a meeting with Paul Hopkinson in the next few days, to discuss this situation. In the past, operatives had not been trusted to keep a supply of parts on their van. However, operatives will now be responsible for stocking up, and accounting for, a basic set of spare parts to avoid leaving the job and minimise unnecessary travelling.

4: Chief Executives Report

Martin Musgrave advised that 3 new Directors had been appointed:

Judith Jones, Director of Customer Services

Trevor Lincoln, Director of Business Planning

Paul Hopkinson, Director of Property Services.

With this full complement of people, Martin will try to attend as many meetings as possible with the SJC, together with at least one of the new Directors. From a business point of view, it is important to improve communications, and therefore a full-time member of staff will be selected by the Federation to work on their behalf, with SLHD being responsible for their Terms and Conditions of Employment.

Martin Musgrave informed the meeting that the Mock Inspection has highlighted some positives, including the attitude of staff, and the standards of voids, which are excellent. However, negative points raised include inconsistencies and the timescale and cost of voids. Some of these negative figures can be easily explained, for example the Shale Bungalows at Scawsby, which are being costed, and may be brought back into stock. However, when back on stock, the Bungalows will have been empty for a very large number of days, which will look bad for SLHD figures, but relevant explanations will be needed to qualify this. Linda Teasdale questioned whether housing stock that needs major works would need to be taken back into run-of-the-mill voids, which would have a negative impact on figures. Martin replied that SLHD will be revising their methods of monitoring, and are also looking at ways to deal with fire damaged properties. No Contractors seem to want to tender for this work, and so we are going to have to deal with this ourselves.

The Consultants for the Mock Inspection were concerned over Disabled access to office premises. The Depots were also in a poor state, with very little space, and Martin expressed surprise that operatives had managed to provide their service in such adverse conditions. SLHD are considering combining areas in order to improve and consolidate the service.

Martin Musgrave advised that the Audit Commission want to see SLHD as an Arms Length Organisation, and the imminent move to new accommodation will serve to reinforce that view. SLHD will soon be moving to Enterprise house, to be re-named St Leger House. There is still work taking place, such

as IT cabling, but it is hoped that the move will take place at the end of March. Budgets have been checked, and the rental costs for the new building are very close to the existing rents being paid,

SLHD are organising a Staff Conference for the first week in March, to run over 5 days. Every member of staff will be attending for one day, and CragRats will be producing the Conference. Customer Care and Equality & Diversity will be emphasised, in order to prepare all staff to move forward.

Martin informed the meeting that SLHD will have its own website, which is to be a most important method of communication. IT have been working on other critical areas, but will now be addressing this issue. Improvement Programmes will be sent to all offices, and the Federation will have a website where the address can be entered, and details of improvements over the next 5 years can be accessed. The Improvement Programme is being piloted at the moment, and will be available, together with translations into alternative languages, within 2 – 3 weeks.

SLHD are filming for a corporate DVD next week, and are looking for volunteers to appear and help to provide visual information for tenants. In addition, whenever SLHD staff visit a home in any capacity, the tenant will be asked to fill in a questionnaire, which will provide valuable information on diversity, ethnic origin and preferred methods of communication, for example, whether the tenant needs large print, Braille, audiotape, or an alternative language. Questionnaires have already been sent out to all tenants, and we are currently looking at 25% returns. This figure needs to be improved, and so when SLHD staff visit homes, this will provide the opportunity to collect further information to enable more efficient methods of communication.

Martin Musgrave introduced Paul Hopkinson, the new Director of Property Services. Paul expressed pleasure in meeting everyone, and emphasised his enthusiasm for participation. His main duties will be to head up property repairs, and also to deliver the Improvement Programme, which will be the main focus. One of the most urgent requirements will be to find out what people want from a Repairs Call Centre. Equally important is the need to update the old-fashioned Stores system, as highlighted by Martin earlier. In order to improve efficiency, it is most important that operatives have the right parts and tools on their vans, to ensure a rapid response to repairs. The Mock Inspection has picked up the need to address this area in order to streamline and update the present system.

Martin Musgrave informed the meeting that there will be new elements of funding introduced, to deal with smaller issues on estates, such as fencing, seats, bollards, and skips. Managers will have some money to use at their discretion, for small improvements. These small pots of money will be for effective improvements on the estate, which will make tenants more aware that problems are being addressed.

5: CLO Report

Lynn Chamberlain reported for the CLO team. Highfields, Mallin Drive and Hill Top Crescent TARA have now decided to become Tenants Clubs. Kevin Millington raised concerns about the number of TARAs that are disbanding. He advised that Trafalgar TARA is also closing, and if this trend continues, the role of the Federation will be reduced. Janet Clarke explained that SLHD are trying to revitalise some TARAs which are struggling for members. However, there is a positive strategy to address non-TARAs who are basically operating as Tenants Club, before the Inspection in September. Sue Wilkinson considered that more training was required in communications, in order to encourage Secretaries to distribute minutes and information. Martin Musgrave spoke about staff shortages, with the two CLOs currently unable to address the workload. When Lynne Harrison returns to work, and the fourth CLO is appointed, there will be more community support available. Also, when the new member of staff is appointed by the Federation, this additional resource will ensure that information and minutes are systematically circulated. Lyn Ralph thanked the CLOs for all their work undertaken, which had increased as Lynne Harrison is off work. Their efforts were much appreciated.

Linda Teasdale raised the question of repairs and complaints that are reported to the Federation, and suggested that the SJC list the services that they will provide. Janet Clarke advised the meeting that SLHD is trying to encourage tenants to use CCOOnline for reporting these issues. Lyn Ralph explained there was no problem with CCOOnline picking out a repetitive problem, but if that reporting service fails, it could then come to the SJC for action.

Two new TARAs have been formed, Victoria Road TARA and Cantley South TARA. Success stories include Cantley 1,2 & 3 TARA who have had extra lighting erected, and Craganour TARA who have been granted the Duke of York Award.

There will be a DVD for all new tenants, and filming for this will start next week. Some tenants have indicated that they would be interested in taking part in the video.

The ACE Team meetings now have SJC and TARA representatives who have volunteered to attend. Lyn distributed a full list to the meeting.

Lynn thanked all the SJC members and other tenants who had taken part in the Focus Group meetings. There will be feedback from the Mock Inspection next week.

Lyn informed the meeting that Janet Walters has now taken up her position as Customer Care Officer, which is included in the Community Liaison Section. Mahroof Hussain, the new Equality & Diversity Manager, will be starting work on Monday 27th February. The new CLO and Equality & Diversity Officer candidates will be interviewed w/c 6th March.

7: Chairs Report

Linda Teasdale reported that there were a number of houses on her estate that appeared to be unoccupied, that may be used as a Giro drop. Lyn Ralph added that there were also a number of properties on her estate which she had similarly suspected and reported. She suggested that if this scenario was occurring across the Borough, many properties could be involved in a similar manner. Martin Musgrave commented that it was difficult for the Housing Officers to assess whether the house was occupied or not, because when the Estates Officer arrived for an appointment, the tenant was always there. Brian Naughton suggested caution before reporting a property as unoccupied, as the tenants could actually be on holiday. Paul Hopkinson continued that a similar situation had occurred in the Gas Section, where operatives had entered a property only to discover that the tenant had been ill, and moved in with relatives temporarily. Martin Musgrave outlined the difficulties of covertly watching people, and explained that you need to have written permission to take pictures of anyone. SLHD do have to follow correct procedures in order to prove that people are not residing at a property, but that any address sent forward as appearing to be unoccupied will be investigated.

Lyn Ralph raised the issue of a tenant from Kirkstone Close, Balby, who was informed that she owed £94.94 in rent on a property that was not suitable for her to occupy. The lady was paying rent on her existing property, and being charged rent for her new bungalow, despite problems with the shower, cupboards and replastering, making it impossible for her to move into the property. Martin Musgrave explained that if the tenant needs a crossover period of 1 or 2 weeks in order to move, that is acceptable while only paying rent on the existing property. However, if the property is not ready for occupation, then it is unreasonable to charge the tenant rent for both.

Brian Norton explained to the meeting that he was concerned about a tenant in his area had great difficulties getting in and out of the bath, which is very slippery. A walk-in shower is therefore necessary at this property. Lyn Ralph advised that there has been criticism over the installation of acrylic baths. She raised the issue of provision of ramps for disabled tenants, who may be housebound, but unfortunately there is a 14 month waiting-list for assessment. Martin Musgrave explained that the Mayor's Statement did include access to all properties on demand. However, if SLHD provided all the necessary adaptations, the cost would be £8M. Lyn Ralph suggested that financial implications were not the only limitations to provision, as a request for a ramp requires the Occupational Therapy team to visit, measure and assess. As there was currently only one Occupational Therapist, there would obviously be a long waiting list. However, Martin concluded that budget was the main restriction, and if SLHD had more Occupational Therapists, they would simply run out of budget faster. SLHD would look at those tenants with the greatest need, and supply ramps accordingly.

Lyn Ralph advised that there had been a meeting with Alex Stevenson from District Heating, to discuss why prices were set at £6.30 for 200Kw hours, which meant that some of the poorest estates in the Borough were paying between £24 and £30 per week to heat their homes. Dean Rothwell had

explained that there was a system in place to flag up which tenants are not using fuel, but this is not monitored regularly. Martin Musgrave added that SLHD are conducting a full Options Appraisal at St James Street and Ennerdale, in an attempt to solve some of these problems. It was considered that District Heating is the best option, but there is a need to identify cold points and investigate an Insulation Programme. Lyn Ralph suggested that tests should be carried out on the heat loss from Silverwood House, which has just been refurbished and provided with extra external insulation, for temperatures and therefore subsequent costs of heating, before and after the extra insulation was added. Dean Rothwell is back at work next week, and will be looking closely at these issues to assess whether there is any room for price reductions. Martin will report on the findings at the next meeting.

Sue Wilkinson had attended a meeting about the Local Development Core Framework, and the Housing Strategy had identified the need to build 1,000 new properties per year, but also to demolish 200. Proposed demolitions included:

302 properties on Howbeck, Granby & Royal Estates,
488 at Windhill and Wath Road
218 – 463 at Denaby.

Martin Musgrave advised that SLHD had not been consulted on this issue. Frank Knapton suggested that PathFinder should come under the umbrella of SLHD, as they should be consulted over issues which influence housing stock. Martin explained that SLHD has to reduce housing stock by 10% over 2 years, otherwise there will be penalties against subsidies, which could result in financial implications of £4M. There had been less than 900 sales through Right-to-Buy over the year. Brian Naughton suggested that Right-to-Buy numbers had fallen due to rising property prices. Martin Musgrave agreed, adding that rising prices were following a national trend. Kevin Millington enquired whether there would be changes to this system if SLHD achieved 3 Stars. Martin Musgrave explained that SLHD currently only see 47p out of every £1 rent, and the rest goes towards subsidising tenants on benefits. If SLHD becomes a 3 Star authority, the business plan repayment profile will change the way that money is received from the public purse. Doncaster has had high levels of Housing Account Reserves in the past, but this will be reduced to £1.5M after next year. If Housing stock was reduced, SLHD would become cash-rich.

Lyn Ralph informed the meeting that the number of Leaseholders had increased to 240, and therefore recommended that up to 2 Leaseholder representatives be co-opted onto the Committee. The proposal was seconded and voted through unanimously. Janet Clarke advised that the KLOEs had raised concerns over SLHD engagement with Leaseholders. It was recognised that Leaseholders do receive special services from SLHD, such as maintenance of properties and communal areas, and there was a need to be more pro-active in consulting.

8: Any Other Business

Sue Wilkinson explained to the meeting that the Local Development Framework was consulting until 10th March.

Vivien Binks advised that she had spoken with Andy Kershaw from BBC Radio Sheffield, and he had expressed an interest in covering the Silver Jubilee celebrations in March at the SJC AGM;. Lyn Ralph suggested that he should get in touch with her, to discuss possible arrangements.

Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday 30th March 2006 at 2pm