

South Essex Homes Limited
Minutes of Income Focus Group
13th March 2023

Civic Centre Committee Room 3

Attendees: Daniel Lyon (Director of Finance & Corporate Services), Lauren Anderson (Specialist Income Management Team Manager), Rachel Pedlar (minutes – Specialist Income Team Assistant). Keith Ducker, Diane Nicholls, Chris McPhillips, Edna Phillips, Brenda Tilley, Terry Swinney

Apologies: Brenda Chapman

Agenda Items		Action
Item 1	Welcome and Introductions by the Chair (Staffing Update):	
	<p>Introductions made by all in attendance and staff identified position in company.</p> <p>Members present advised by DL and LA that SPUTT and LTHOMAS no longer work for South Essex Homes. Members of the Group expressed surprise and advised they had not been made aware of this. Apologies made for them not having been advised earlier.</p>	
Item 2	Minutes of last meeting:	
	<p>Agreed all okay by those present.</p>	
Item 3	<p>Income Management Performance update:</p> <p>DL advised that the current economic climate is having an impact on the rent collection. The arrears have increased when compared against 2021/22.</p> <p>DL confirmed current rent arrears are higher than our target (2.50%), but when compared with other organisations in the sector we are performing better than most in the sector. Majority are averaging 3%, our stats show us at 2.64%</p> <p>Increase on 2021/2022 of tenants in arrears over 7 weeks. Target is 5.25% we are currently at 5.89% so little higher than our target.</p> <p>BT queried the meaning of “Write-Offs (cash value)” and what it actually means. DL explained that this is the balance of the accounts where we</p>	

	<p>are not able to collect on an arrears, i.e. following the death of tenant and no monies in the Estate (NoK not liable to clear the balance), or where tenants have vacated (moved, evicted etc) and we have explored all avenues to collect the monies owed and the balance is now deemed as uncollectable. DL also advised that the amount is on parr with others in the sector.</p> <p>DL is to provide explanation on how we compare stats at the next meeting.</p> <p>KD pleased that the overall number of tenants in arrears have fallen, despite the amount owed having increased.</p> <p>Panel generally pleased arrears figures are going down despite the cost of living.</p>	
--	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--

Item 4	Terms of reference role of the group going forward:	
	<p>DL advised not able to locate the terms of reference for the group. KD advised that SRickards should have this on file. DL/LA to speak to Sue upon her return and update the terms and send them to the Group.</p> <p>DL & LA asked how the meetings should be held? They were previously done on a quarterly basis. Would quarterly meetings be the preference? Group agreed that quarterly meetings would be preference.</p> <p>TS – raised the issue of number of members, as a number of participants have decreased. He suggested we promote the group and see if we can get more tenants involved. LA/DL advised promotion in hand</p> <p>TS advised that the group used to be asked for opinions and input into how we operate. DL confirmed we still require their input on a range of issues, including communication between the organisation, the group and the tenants. How we can improve on this and all aspects of our services. How we can act on feedback from our tenants.</p> <p>It was raised by a number of the group that they do not know who their Tenancy Officers are. It was agreed that a list of Tenancy Officers be supplied to them. Suggest this also includes the patch they cover.</p> <p>TS suggested that Tenancy Service Officers knock on resident's doors and introduce themselves. Good way to get to meet our tenants and see if there is anything we can assist with.</p> <p>DL advised that there is a "Housing Group" being formed and that the Tenancy Service Officers would be involved with this.</p>	<p>DL/LA</p> <p>DL/LA</p> <p>DL</p>

Item 5	Rent, Service Charge and Heating Charge increase:	
	<p>DL advised that the increase level of set by the Government and is usually CPI + 1%, this would have led to an 11% increase on rent costs. However, the Government offered options, 3%, 5% and 7%. The Housing Sector felt the 3% option was not viable financially, as other costs had to</p>	

	<p>be considered and factored in. It was finally agreed that the increase would be set at 7%.</p> <p>TS asked if the overall costs of energy was to reduced, would that saving be passed onto the Tenants. DL advised he was not sure but the situation would be monitored.</p> <p>It was explained to the Group that due to the rise in Energy costs it had cost us far more than anticipated and a large percentage of the increase was due to the costs involved in the running of the sheltered schemes.</p> <p>DN suggested we turn the heating down in some of the schemes, as they are always so very hot when she visited. DL advised that we had in fact already turned the heating down by a degree or so, but we also have a duty of care to all residents to ensure they are warm. He also advised that the situation is being monitored. He went onto explain that some of the systems are old and that it would be expensive to replace the existing infrastructure (pipes etc). We had looked into removing some of the systems and installing individual boiler systems into each of the flats, but there are a some properties where this is not feasible.</p> <p>BT asked if the communal lounges in our schemes are thermostat controlled in the room, or if by a central unit. She said that they seem to be very hot, even when no one is using them. Suggested they could be turned down. DL advised he was not sure if they are individually controlled. He also mentioned that there are some residents who open the windows and then leave the lounge without shutting the windows, thereby allowing all the heat to escape, so the system works harder to keep an average temperature. This was agreed on by all to be an issue.</p> <p>Concerns expressed by a couple of the group that there were no wardens on duty when they had visited. KD explained that the Sheltered Officers visited each day and how it work. DL confirmed service now more flexible</p>	
--	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--

Item 6	<p>Prize Draw:</p> <p>LA asked the Group if they felt the Prize Draw was an incentive to get tenants to pay their rents. She also advised we had not run it for a few months and we had not received any queries about this.</p> <p>Members agreed that was not much of an incentive. Most believed that paying the rent was something that should be done automatically. No need for a reward.</p> <p>RP suggested that the money that was “earmarked” for the Prize Draw be put towards the Hardship Fund instead. This was agreed on by the Group members.</p>	
Item 7	<p>Out of hours phone calls and visits:</p> <p>LA explained that this was being undertaken as Pilot scheme for the last 6 weeks, where staff make “out of hours” calls between the hours of 6pm</p>	

	<p>and 8pm for those we are unable to contact during normal working hours, to help reduce the arrears figures. She reported to the Group that it had so far, been successful and more arrears arrangements had been implemented. She advised that less “Out of Hours” visits had been completed.</p> <p>LA did not have figures to hand but should be able to present to the group next time they meet. LA also advised the Group that the scheme would be reviewed at the end of March.</p> <p>Group thought it was a good idea.</p>	LA
Item 8	<p>HQN Re-Accreditation:</p> <p>HQN Re-Accreditation due to take place on the 21st March.</p> <p>LA gave brief overall review of what is involved. This review is carried out by an External organisation who carry out a full audit on our services/processes, by discussing with staff, internal and external partner agencies we work with. LA expressed her confidence that we shall get Re-Accredited.</p> <p>LA to provide update at next meeting</p>	
Item 9	<p>Date of next meeting:</p> <p>Date of next meeting to be advised. LA to advise.</p> <p>KD would prefer first two weeks in June.</p>	