



## **Board**

**26 May 2009**

### **Items for Information**

#### **1. Introduction**

The attached are for information:

- (i) Chief Executive's Report
- (ii) Delegated Decisions 14 April to 2009
- (iii) Petitions Monitoring
- (iv) Minutes :
  - Audit Committee held on 15 January 2009
  - Outer West & North Area Board held on 9 March 2009
  - Inner West Area Board held on 10 March 2009
  - East Area Board held on 12 March 2009
  - Property Committee held on 16 March 2009

#### **2. Recommendation**

Board is asked to receive these items for information.

#### **Contact Officer:**

Maureen Dickson, Company Administrator and Board Support Officer, ext 28624

## Board

26 May 2009

## Chief Executive's Report

Report by John P Lee

### FOR INFORMATION

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report aims to give Board a taste of some up and coming national developments that are influencing the work that YHN is involved in currently and that they may be asked to look at in more detail at some future date.

#### 2. Your Homes Newcastle Strategic Objectives

- 2.1 The current and future developments discussed in the report will influence the delivery of all our current strategic objectives:
- Support and care to communities
  - Three star excellent services
  - A quality workforce
  - Refurbishing and building homes

#### 3. Key Issues

##### 3.1 Design and Sustainability

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), has appointed six industry experts to provide independent strategic policy advice to the HCA on design and sustainability.

The advisory group will have an important role in helping the HCA deliver its statutory objectives around standards of design and embedding sustainability in development.

Dru Vesty MBE, will Chair the Design and Sustainability Advisory Group. Commenting on the appointments, she said: "Good design is crucial to creating great places with communities sustainable over time. This high calibre panel of experts can support and challenge the HCA and its partners as they work to deliver better homes and places to live".

As part of its remit, the group will provide an impartial annual review to the HCA

Board of how the HCA performs against its statutory duty and how it can continue to improve its policies and procedures relating to the delivery of design quality and sustainable development.

The HCA is working towards developing a set of design and quality standards, which will be published for consultation in Summer 2009.

Currently, development partners are required to achieve the ex-Housing Corporation design standards and ex-English Partnerships quality standards for schemes on its land.

### **3.2 Denton and the Flanagan Review on Integrated neighbourhood policing and management**

The Denton partnership has been identified as one of 12 exemplar sites in the Flanagan Review of Policing (2008) which identified the need for neighbourhood policing to be more closely integrated with neighbourhood management, which it defined as:

“Neighbourhood management is about improving the way key services are delivered, tailoring them to the needs and priorities in a defined neighbourhood. Working with a neighbourhood manager and team, it requires effective participation by local residents and organisations, and commitment from local service providers to work in partnership at the strategic and neighbourhood level”

In order to progress this integration, the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) have identified 12 'exemplar sites'. The sites offer joint service delivery solutions in a range of formats, and cover a wide cross-section of the neighbourhood experience of England and Wales.

As well as being promoted as sites of good practice, the 12 exemplars have a practical role to play. During 2009/10, each site has agreed to act as a learning hub and mentor to other partnerships attempting a similar integration. Each exemplar site will be available via email, telephone or site visit to assist with any queries. The wealth of knowledge and experience held in these 12 teams will be made available to every neighbourhood policing team and crime and disorder partnership in the country.

The review says about the Denton Partnership that, 'it draws its strength from its resident involvement and engagement, and its use of SNAPS, a multi-agency tasking group bringing together officers from statutory and voluntary sectors to spot and tackle emerging issues in partnership.

There is a robust structure in place to deal with emerging concerns in partnership. Denton is piloting a participatory budgeting scheme with the Home Office, which enables yet greater public involvement. It is also piloting neighbourhood charters, which draw up a contract between residents and partnerships'.

### 3.3 Comprehensive Area Assessments

The National Housing Federation has published a briefing note explaining how social landlords will interact with the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA).

The NHF briefing note outlines the main tenets of the Audit Commission's new regime stating that:

CAA places great importance on the priorities agreed in the Local Area Agreement (LAA). As housing providers are key partners in delivering several LAA priorities, their work will come under Audit Commission scrutiny as part of the area inspection.

CAA will not directly link to Audit Commission housing inspections, the framework concentrates on 'place' (i.e. a local authority area) rather than specific organisations.

CAA is an ongoing process, rather than an inspection 'event'. Audit Commission appointed 'CAA Leads' will cover LAA areas to help coordinate local assessments and local teams.

The full briefing and contact details for further information are available to download from the the [NHF website](#).

## 4. Work in Progress

- 4.1 YHN's Chair and Pat Ritchie Regional Director of the HCA met on 30 April to discuss how we can work with the HCA around issues such as Empty homes....

## 5 Next Steps

- 5.1 Will report regularly to Board about developments in these areas

**Contact Officer:** Diane Creighton extension 28701



## Board 26 May 2009

### Delegated Decisions – Schedule of non-confidential Delegated Decisions taken between 14 April and 15 May 2009

No	Directorate/Delegated Officer	Authorised Date	Subject	Cost/Budget Provision	Ward
1.	<b>Your Homes Newcastle</b> Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	4/30/2009	Appointment of an advisor to undertake a quality assurance role for the Service Improvement Programme	Cost £12,000 Code 1YDA6 / D404	All Wards
2.	<b>Your Homes Newcastle</b> Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	4/30/2009	Various Garage Demolitions	Cost NIL (Rent/Service Charge Implications Per Annum - Weekly rent for garages is currently £7.44. The annual rental loss as a result of garage demolitions is £13,020).	All Wards
3.	<b>Your Homes Newcastle</b> Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	5/8/2009	Fire Detection System ? Tom Collins House	The cost of £28,949 will be met from the Fire Safety Improvements Budget	Byker
4.	<b>Your Homes Newcastle</b> Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	5/8/2009	Alteration Work to Communal Areas at Shield Court, Margaret Collins House and Conewood House	Funding of the total expenditure amounting to £17,807 will be met from the Housing Investment Programme	Ouseburn; Byker; Fawdon



**Board**

**26 May 2009**

**Petitions Monitoring**

<b>Petitioners:</b>	<b>Residents of North Kenton</b>		
<b>Received:</b>	6 May 2009	<b>Response:</b>	
<b>Issues:</b>	This petition relates to a request for a succession of tenancy of a high demand property. This matter is being investigated by the Principal Housing Manager.		



## **Audit Committee**

15 January 2009

(5.30 pm – 6.50 pm)

### **Present:**

R Harral (In the Chair)

J Cuthbertson

J Common

L Stephenson

### **Also Present:**

S Murphy Chair of Board

### **In Attendance:**

R Atkinson - Director of Finance and Resources

A Lister - Finance Manager – Financial Business Support

K McDonald - Democratic Services

J Miller - Democratic Services

## 16 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from G Knox, P J Morrissey and G Allison.

## 17 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED** – That the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the confidential minutes of the previous meeting and the following items:

### **Internal Audit Work Undertaken and Reports**

### **Update on Progress Against Internal Audit Recommendations**

## 20 **MINUTES**

### (a) **23 October 2008**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 23 October 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## **Matters Arising:-**

### **(a) Delegated Decision System**

(Minute No. 3(a) refers).

R Atkinson advised that if it was decided to go ahead with the Newcastle City Council delegated decision system it would need to be checked and to ensure it met all the requirements in response to the weaknesses highlighted by Internal Audit.

### **(b) Minutes of Meeting held on 12 November 2008**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **(c) Action Plan**

(Minute No. 15 refers).

It was AGREED that the issues raised at the special meeting be re-visited following the outcome of the review of the YHN Committee structure.

The Chair indicated he would revisit the action plan looking at how/when/by whom the actions could be achieved.

## **21 STRATEGIC RISK MONITOR**

Submitted: Report by Lead Performance Management and Policy Officer (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

A Lister circulated an updated copy of the YHN Strategic Risk – Summary Register January 2009 (copy attached to Official Minutes) which included management team comments. The Committee considered the summary register, in particular those risks that it was recommended to move to a dead risk. It was noted that the final decision on this matter lay with board.

### **(a) Failure to Implement Adequate Systems for YHN Asset Ownership Management**

Members discussed the proposal that this be moved to a dead risk. It was suggested that this was a large substantive risk if not covered. Although YHN had scored well in this area in the past, if it materialised in the future it could have major consequences. It was pointed out that the Risk Register was the driver for the Audit Plan, so if a committee wished the area to be audited; it would need to remain on the Risk Register.

It was agreed to leave the discussion to Board as to whether this was moved to a dead risk.

(b) **Diversification from Core Business results in decline in key services**

Members discussed the proposal that this be moved to a dead risk and it was felt that the timing may not be right given YHN's changing structure in relation to the subsidiary structure being developed. It was agreed to leave the discussion to board as to whether this was moved to a dead risk.

(c) **Changes in Government Policy**

It was agreed to recommend to Board that this be moved to a dead risk.

22 **ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENT**

Submitted report by Finance Manager Financial Business Support (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

A Lister introduced the report which introduced the Annual Assurance Statement 2008/09. This was the Statement of Internal Controls and was required by Newcastle City Council by the 31 March 2009. Members felt that this was a very comprehensive document. A Lister explained that the document could not be signed off until the end of March as it represented the period up to 31 March 2009.

It was noted that the Delegated Decision System would be checked by Internal Audit.

**RESOLVED** – That the Annual Assurance Statement 2008/09 be agreed.

23 **REVISED AUDIT COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN**

As discussed early in the meeting it was agreed that this be reconsidered following the outcome of the review of the YHN Committee structure.

The Chair indicated that he would revisit the action plan, looking at how/when/by whom the actions could be achieved.

24 **AUDIT COMMITTEE WORKPLAN**

Submitted: Report by Finance Manager – Financial Business Support (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

It was:-

**RESOLVED – That:**

- (i) the Action Plan be considered at the next meeting following the review of the YHN Committee structure.
- (ii) it was agreed in future the YHN Audit Committee would take place at 5.00 pm with a member pre-meeting at 4.30 pm.

25 **SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL KIT**

The Chair referred to a recent conference he had attended on behalf of YHN and to a self-assessment tool which had been discussed at the conference which it may be worthwhile using as a template for Board and committees. The Chair of Board indicated that he was aware of this tool kit, consideration had been given to use in parts of it for the review. It may be used for the Board review next year.

Your Homes Newcastle Outer West and North Area Board  
9 March 2009

(5.30 pm – 6.15 pm)

**Present:**

I Laverick (In the Chair)

K Best, L Hunter, G Pattison, E Lough and G Allison

**In Attendance:**

A Hodgson - Your Homes, Newcastle  
S Gardner - Hour Homes, Newcastle  
P Vose - Your Homes, Newcastle  
D O'Connor - Your Homes, Newcastle  
R Smithson - Democratic Services

**73 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from M Lynch, M Morris, S Freed and D Lawson.

**74 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2009**

The minutes were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**Matters Arising:-**

None

**75 PERFORMANCE, MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING**

Submitted: Report by Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Business.

A Hodgson outlined the report as attached.

It was noted that in December and January targets had been exceeded for:

- Satisfaction with repairs and maintenance
- Satisfaction with investment programme

- Number of void properties available to let.
- Programme investment packages delivered.
- Cases referred to HASBET and dealt with within the timescales.

Targets had not been achieved but were heading in the right direction for:

- Reduction in rent arrears.
- Average re-let time
- Number of homes made decent.

On satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service it was noted that as the targets were consistently being achieved it had been agreed that the target levels would be raised.

On programmed investment packages delivered it was noted it was expected that the year end targets would be met.

On number of homes made decent it was noted although the target was not being achieved performance was moving in the right direction.

On void re-let times it was noted that although the target was not being met, performance was improving. Continued review of officers performance was taking place and the re-let time was down to 38.1 days for the Outer West and North area.

On a number of void properties available to let it was noted that the target had been achieved. There were only 88 void properties in the Outer West and North. A Hodgson highlighted a piece of work was being carried out again to scrutinise performance of individual officers and identify issues.

On reduction in rent arrears it was noted that performance was close to the target and was travelling in the right direction.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received for information.

## 76 **SERVICE STANDARD MONITORING**

Submitted: Report by Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Business.

A Hodgson outlined the report as attached.

In December and January the service standards measured were for Community

Housing Management, HASBET and Customer Services.

For Community Housing Management, A Hodgson highlighted that the way performance against standards was measured needed to be reviewed to ensure accuracy. Also some standards require 100 percent performance which would mean that for example if one letter out of 200 had been sent a day late performance targets would not be achieved.

The red standards included:

- We will give you a copy of our standard for empty homes and will tell you what work we will do to your home before you move in. Our target is to meet the standard for at least 95 percent of new tenancies.
- We will visit you at home within six weeks of you moving in to discuss any problems you may have, including paying your rent.
- If you visit any of our offices our reception staff will see you within five minutes of you arriving.
- We will answer your phone call within five rings.

Standards which were amber for performance were:

- We will make sure that all Your Choice Homes applications received to community housing offices are registered within five working days.
- If you report anti social behaviour to us we will contact you within the following times to offer you a face to face interview or interview by phone or by e-mail if you prefer. Timescales are based on how serious the anti social behaviour is.
- If you write to us we will reply within ten working days.

A member asked how effective HASBET in dealing with cases where the landlord was a private landlord. It was noted that there was an officer specifically dedicated to dealing with private landlords however, powers were more limited than those cases where Newcastle City Council was the landlord. Landlord absenteeism was a major problem in dealing with cases. It was noted that Deborah Peel was the officer responsible, although she was now leaving Your Homes Newcastle.

It was also highlighted that if the landlord were accredited by the Council they may be able to take action. A member mentioned that similar problems had been occurring in Lemington and agreed to pass on the relevant information to the other member.

On customer service three standards were red. These included:-

- If you visit any of our officers or reception staff will see you within five minutes of you arriving.
- We will answer 90 percent of calls within five rings.

It was noted that performance for these was difficult to record due to lack of timing equipment at some of the YHN offices. On the latter service standard it was explained that officers who were not answering calls within five rings were being monitored to see the reasons why.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received for information.

## 77 **MODERN HOMES STANDARDS AND INVESTMENT PROGRAMME**

Submitted: Report by Investment Manager.

D O'Connor outlined the report as attached.

She highlighted new starts taking place within the area. These included amongst others:-

- External works to 124 units of Blakelaw 1936 houses.
- External works to 120 units at Kenton Bar Mid Rise.
- External works to 72 units at North Fenham, Stamfordham Road.

She went on to outline the results of the benchmarking process. In this exercise it was proposed that the following partners received an increased allocation.

- Mears
- Kendal Cross
- Rok
- Turney Wylde

It was proposed that the following partners received a reduced allocation:-

- Frank Haslam Milan
- Straightline

- Citybuild

It was proposed that the following partners received no allocation:-

- Gordon Durham
- Mansell
- Morrison
- Lovell
- Waites

Customer survey data was also outlined. It was noted that the only area of concern was South Gosforth which had received a 78% satisfaction rate. This would be looked into as part of the standard process with tenants being invited in to discuss what problems had led to the satisfaction rating.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received for information.

## 78 **AREA PROJECT FUND**

A Hodgson outlined the report as attached. She highlighted Appendix 1 with the allocation of revenue and capital budget available outlined. Of the £233,600 budget available, £226,779 had been committed with the remainder to be held as a contingency fund.

A member asked how funding was allocated. A Hodgson explained that this was on a pro-rata base based on a number of YHN properties within the separate areas. A member asked if a breakdown of this number of properties per area could be provided.

A Hodgson outlined methods of ensuring value for money were being looked at e.g. instead of separate fence projects being contracted out, one contractor may be appointed to carry out all the fencing identified through Area projects, allowing for economies of scale.

In response to a members question, it was explained that a MGA was a multi use games area.

A member highlighted the block of flats in Lemington which had been scheduled to have additional cladding. Officers agreed to look into this and get back to the member on when this was supposed to be carried out.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received for information.

## REVIEW OF AREA BOARDS

A Hodgson gave the meeting a brief verbal update on the review of the Area Boards which had been taking place.

At the meeting on the 19 February 2009 members of the Time Limited Committee received a report which summarised the information presented to date. This report was attached for information to the tabled document.

The focus of the remainder of the meeting was taken up with a debate around the recommendations which were presented to the Board around the future of the Area Board and their current format.

In order to stimulate debate 6 options were presented to members at the Time Limited Committee. These options ranged from continuing to run area boards in the existing format to ending the operation in its current format. The following principles formed the basis of the recommendations which will be made to Board.

- To dissolve Area Boards in their current structure.
- To run themed meetings in neighbourhoods across the city to respond to issues raised by local residents. At each themed meeting information would be presented on local housing issues, local performance would be reported, feedback from estate walkabouts would be presented and potential schemes for housing project fund schemes would be discussed.
- Where local neighbourhood agreements are operating the themed meetings could be used to escalate issues of under performance.
- Local housing staff would continue to engage in Newcastle City Council's ward committee structure and would continue to be committed to developing neighbourhood agreements.
- Members of the Board would be invited to attend themed meetings on a regular basis.
- Board and ward committee would receive a summary report on the issues raised by residents.
- The themed meetings would be responsive to the needs of the local community and be able to influence the agenda and would increase the credibility of local staff in key performance areas.

A Hodgson commented that there would still be a role for independent members to sit on the Independent Advisory Group if they still wished to be involved.

A member commented that ward committees could carry out a performance

monitoring role from an area prospective.

A Hodgson highlighted that neighbourhood agreements had been expensive to implement. The process was still being rolled out across the City but this would take some time and the process may not be appropriate for some areas. In Byker and Denton the process had been successful.

**RESOLVED** – That the update be received for information.

80 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting was currently scheduled for 11 May but needed to be confirmed due to the bank holiday at the start of May.

## Inner West Area Board

10 March 2009  
(5.30 pm – 6.30 pm)

### Present:

G Knox (In the Chair)

### In Attendance:

S Bagnall - Your Homes Newcastle  
T Healy - Your Homes Newcastle  
S Colligan - Your Homes Newcastle  
P Moody - Democratic Services

### 1 QUORUM

It was noted that there was no quorum for the meeting.

### 2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Renton, James and Stephenson and from E Morris, P Stafford and K Bryant.

### 3 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 20 January 2009 were approved as a correct record.

### 4 MODERN HOMES STANDARD INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2008/09

The report of the Area Investment Manager was introduced by S Bagnall.

It was indicated that customer satisfaction had increased to 97%. That figure was very pleasing as it also included internal works schemes. Most schemes were proceeding satisfactorily although there were some delays on some schemes.

With regard to particular schemes the following was indicated:-

- Estate 230 – Slatyford No Fines – External Works to 250 Properties. The scheme start date had been delayed, however this was now on site.
- Westgate Road Multi Storey Properties. This was the next big scheme to commence and details of the contractor were given. There would be a great

deal of effort to keep people informed about the scheme. The contractor had learned a lot from previous schemes which were of a similar type.

## 5 **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING**

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Business was introduced by T Healy. Reference was made to the following aspects:-

- With regard to a reduction in rent arrears it was noted that there was a red traffic light against the performance against standard although the direction of travel was upwards. It was commented that the target was set at a high standard and there was a possibility that this would be met by the end of the year. It was noted that K Bryant was planning another rent arrears campaign which would lead to an improvement in the situation.

In this connection reference was made to a letter sent to Board members by the Chair of Your Homes Newcastle relating to a Government announcement regarding rent increases. The letter referred to a press article indicating that Council rents were to be cut. The letter indicated that, at this stage, it was not known what the process would be for accessing the Central Government Subsidy in order to reduce the rent.

- With regard to the voids re-let time the performance against target showed a red traffic light although the direction of travel was upwards. It was indicated that there were a number of estates with difficulties and the addition of just a few properties could lead to a reduction in performance. Reference was made to the action that was taken to monitor the situation and the action taken to let properties earlier.
- With regard to the number of void properties available to let performance against target was good but the direction of travel was downwards.
- With regard to the percentage of cases referred to HASBET within the timescales it was noted the performance against target was good and the direction of travel was upwards.

## 6 **SERVICE STANDARD MONITORING**

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Business was introduced by T Healy. Reference was particularly made to the seven Service Standards which had a red traffic light and to a number of the areas which had an amber traffic light.

## **7 FUTURE OF AREA BOARDS**

T Healy referred to a report of the Head of Housing Management to the Your Homes Newcastle Area Board Review meeting on 18 February 2009 which gave a summary of information provided to the Time Limited Committee which was considering the matter.

It was indicated that members of the Time Limited Committee concluded that the current arrangements did not demonstrate good value for money, particularly when measured against outcomes. Committee members felt that the resources could be utilised elsewhere within the organisation for greater benefit.

It was indicated that the Lead Officer was to draft a recommendation which would include:-

- To dissolve Area Boards in their current structure
- To run themed meetings in neighbourhoods across the City to respond to issues raised by local residents
- At each themed meeting, information would be presented on local housing issues, local performance would be reported, feedback from estate walkabouts would be presented and potential schemes for housing project fund schemes would be discussed
- Local housing staff would continue to engage in the Newcastle City Council Ward Committee structure
- Themed meetings would be responsive to the needs of local communities but would be able to influence the agenda and would increase accountability of local staff in key performance areas

The Chair indicated that the information received reflected the debate at the Inner West Area Board.

## **8 AREA POOL SCHEMES**

At the conclusion of the meeting there was a slide show of area pooled schemes which was introduced by S Colligan. It was indicated that there would be a report on these schemes in due course.

## **9 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 12 May 2009 at 5.30 pm

## Your Homes Newcastle – Area Board East

12 March 2009

(5.00 pm – 6.10 pm)

### Present:

D Warman (In the Chair)

D Besag

G Kane

J Stokel-Walker

H Warren

### In Attendance:

T Healy - Your Homes Newcastle

A Todd-Mills - Your Homes Newcastle

I Stearman - Democratic Services, Newcastle City Council

J Miller - Democratic Services

## 7. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from I Johnson, C Harvey, V Dunn and K Graham.

## 8. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### Matters Arising:-

#### (a) Walker Riverside

(Minute no. 3 (d) refers).

T Healy explained that it had been intended to bring a report to this meeting however, the City Councils update report on Walker Riverside had not been received until the end of the previous week. YHN were unable to write their report until they had considered the outcome of the City Council report. He reported that

30 priority cards had been issued around Lancefield Avenue. Due to the uncertainty of the current economic climate the proposal for further housing development on that site and the issue of an additional 60 priority cards had been put back to July 2009 when the situation would be reviewed. As a result of not issuing the additional priority cards, a lot of pressure had been taken off housing demand and the clearance phase could be managed appropriately.

Another issue covered in the report was that the 20% social landlord housing may come in the earlier phase of the new build, again due to the current economic situation.

The report also dealt with the difficulties being experienced with supported tenancies in parts of Byker and Walker and the impact on staffing those services, looking at how to change the balance in that area.

A report would be submitted to the next Area Board on these issues.

(b) **Avondale House**

(Minute no. 3 (c) refers).

It was noted that the feasibility study on Avondale House was still underway.

9. **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING**

Submitted: Report by the Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Business (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

T Healy introduced the report which provided information on performance targets reported voids to this Area Board. The following comments were made:-

(a) T Healy reported that the East End had led the way in this field with an excellent performance which was now down to 26.8 days. This was as a result of the scrutiny work resulting in additional staff training and the carrying out of repairs in the termination period.

(b) **Reduction in Rent Arrears**

The East End was on course to achieve its year end targets. This was a great achievement and had been achieved as much through advice and support as via punitive work. The Chair commented it was good to see the steady decrease and expressed his thanks to all the staff involved in this work.

(c) **Percentage of Cases referred to HASBET**

Staff had been briefed on the current situation and good practice had been emphasised.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received.

10. **SERVICE STANDARD MONITORING**

Submitted: Report by Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Business (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

T Healy introduced the report which detailed performance against service standards for housing management, HABSET and customer services.

The following issues were raised:-

**First Target**

This was amber, but it was noted that no other providers had a 100% target. Members felt this was a very harsh target and should be reviewed.

**Second Target**

This target was flawed as it was based on recollection, rather than actual evidence. This was to be changed for the following year. In future, tenants would receive a booklet and would sign to say they had received a copy of the standard for empty homes which would also include a list of outstanding repairs.

**Third Target**

This performance was disappointing, but it had been discovered that staff were making the visits, but there was an issue of evidencing this.

**Seventh Target**

T Healy commented that there was no reasonable excuse for people not being dealt with quickly enough. This performance level was partly due to data not being inputted into the system, but this situation had to be improved. Members stressed the importance of meeting this target.

**Eighth Target**

T Healy indicated there may have been confusion in that those questioned thought it referred to the time taken to see an officer who could deal with their enquiry, rather than time taken until they were seen by reception staff.

**Ninth Target**

T Healy commented that this was a very disappointing result.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received.

11. **MODERN HOMES INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2008/09**

Submitted: Report by Area Investment Manager (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

A Todd-Mills introduced the report which set out progress on the Modern Homes Programme to February 2009; key achievements of the Modern Homes Programme between January and February 2009 and an update on the key issues affecting the delivery of the Modern Homes Programme. She drew member's attention particularly to the results of the benchmarking and details of changes to allocations to Partners, that had resulted.

In response to a members query, she stated that the Modern Homes Programme was on target to complete, indicating that this had to include the completion of Warm Zone work, internal and external packages. The affordability gap on the programme was now decreasing.

A member queried the position on Church Walk/Dunn Terrace, A Todd-Mills explained that satisfaction rates were based on only four surveys and she had therefore asked for more surveys to be carried out.

A Todd-Mills explained that currently a number of scenarios were being considered for dealing with the windows on Daisy Hill. Nothing had gone out to residents at this stage. Local members stressed the need for them to be kept up to date on this matter. It was pointed out that the Chief Executive of YHN had given an undertaking to speak to the Ward Councillors before any decisions were taken on this matter.

A member queried whether the Byker Wall work would be completed by January 2010. A Todd-Mills explained that it was difficult to say definitely at this stage, measures had been put in place to improve the situation. The Area Board would be informed of progress.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received.

12. **YOUR HOMES NEWCASTLE AREA BOARD REVIEW**

Tabled: Report by Head of Housing Management (tabled and copy attached to Official Minutes).

T Healy introduced the report which provided a summary of the information provided to the Time Limited Committee throughout its operation and highlighted the key issues which had been debated.

It had been recognised that the current Area Board format was not really affected. A gap analysis had identified that a lot of useful work was being carried out by YHN via Ward Committees and various forms of tenant involvement.

Examination of what other ALMO's did had shown there were no clear models for area based work.

The conclusion of the Time Limited Group was that work should not continue in the current format of the Area Board. Instead there would be a series of themed meetings on an ad hoc/occasional basis, instigated by local residents. Currently, if there was an issue local residents wanted to take forward there was no way for them to do this. The detail was still to be worked out. These meetings may take place twice a year or more frequently if necessary.

There was a need for somewhere that feedback from estate walkabouts could be taken and work planned for environmental schemes such as the Local Area Project. There was a need for local members/tenants to take issues forward, but that role was not fulfilled by the Area Board.

In response to a members query regarding the review of Concierges, T Healy commented that there was an internal review looking at various different models around the country. Members indicated that they should have been informed that this review was being carried out, even if it was not possible to give them any detail at this stage. T Healy undertook to feed back this concern to those officers carrying out the review and ask that something be sent out to members.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received.

13. **GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING RENT INCREASES**

Submitted: Letter from Steve Murphy, Chair of Your Homes Newcastle (tabled and copy attached to Official Minutes).

T Healy indicated that more information would be provided to members once YHN were aware of what was happening.

**RESOLVED** – That the letter be noted.

## Property Committee

16 March 2009  
(5.00 pm – 6.05 pm)

### Present:

G Allison (Chair)

### Also Present:

W Bowman, W Drury, J Reid, R Renton, R Higgins, J McLaughlin, J Common and M O'Callaghan

### In Attendance:

N Scott	- Director of Tenancy Services, YHN
D Langhorne	- Assets and Programme Manager YHN
I Gallagher	- Property Maintenance, YHN
A Gibson	- Assets and Programming, YHN
N Rippon	- Strategic Housing, Newcastle City Council
S Darroch	- Democratic Services, Newcastle City Council

## 21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from S Breslin and J Vinton.

## 22. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2009

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of meeting held on 19 January 2009 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### Matters Arising:-

#### (a) YHN Investment Programme – Customer Satisfaction

(Minute No. 12 refers)

A Committee member asked for an update on the position relating to the allocation of work to FHM. D Langhorne confirmed that the issues relating to FHM had been reported to YHN Board. As a result, the company had received a significant reduction in the quantity of internal works allocated, although the amount of external work had been increased as FHM continued to perform well in this area.

**(b) Repairs and Maintenance Contract Budget Update**

(Minute No. 15 refers)

N Scott reported that the work to analyse the impact of the modern homes programme on the Repairs and Maintenance service had not yet been completed. It was now expected that a report would be brought back to Property Committee in May.

**(c) Annual Gas Servicing 2008/09**

(Minute No. 17 refers)

N Scott noted that a report on charges for gas servicing for the next financial year and discount arrangements applying for the current year, was included at Item 9 on the agenda.

**23. YHN CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME – JOINT FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE UPDATE REPORT QUARTER 3**

Submitted: Report by Assets and Programme Manager (previously circulated on a supplemental agenda and copy attached to Official Minutes).

D Langhorne introduced the report and highlighted the following issues for the Committee's information:-

- Table 1 - the changed position from end of Q2 2008/09 to end of Q3 was noted. The potential funding deficit had decreased from £36.8m to £32.5m at the end of Quarter 3 and the current programme contingency had reduced from £7.3m to £4.9m. These movements were in line with expectations, as the real position regarding potential savings was firmed up. It was noted that the position represented a better situation than previous years and was moving in the right direction.
- The Committee was advised that the £4.9m programme contingency should be considered against a backdrop of £12m resource that still remained unsecured for 2011/12. In addition, uncertainty remained regarding external funding for the Byker Wall.
- In terms of pace of completion, at the end of Q3, YHN had completed 5,522 packages and made 4,093 units decent. Pace in recent months had picked up and if current levels continued the programme would exceed target completions for 2008/09 by approximately 400 units. Furthermore, the SAP average energy efficiency rating was now at 66 against a target rating of SAP65.
- The Committee was referred to Table 4 Delivery Performance KPI Scores

Q3 2008/09. Overall, the majority of KPIs were on target. However, concern remained about performance relating to the voids duration targets. It was hoped that the transfer of voids to the Modern Homes Programme One Stop Shop Service in 2009/10, would address this. Customer satisfaction targets for trades and non-trades were also noted to be below target. This had been raised at the Strategic Alliance and it had been stressed to constructors that allocations would potentially be reduced if performance did not improve.

- Overall programme average cost per package delivered to date continued to decrease and was now at £9,507. However, by concentrating work through the highest performing and lowest cost partners, the actual average cost for 2008/09 was £6,229.
- The target average number of packages to be delivered per quarter to achieve decency by 2011/12 was currently 1,692 (assuming the programme ran until the end of 2011/12). YHN was currently well ahead of this target, delivering an average of 2,104 units per quarter.
- With regard to other capital programmes (outside the Modern Homes Programme), the Committee was referred to Table 5. Current programme excess funding for other capital programmes had risen from £5.1m at the end of Q4 07/08, to £7m at the end of Q3 08/09. If necessary, these funds could be vired to the Modern Homes Programme in due course.

The Chair thanked D Langhorne for the report and noted that good progress was being made to drive down costs without reducing quality. A number of questions were then raised in discussion:-

- (i) A Committee member referred to section 2.10 of the report which made reference to construction partners not receiving new allocations in 2008/09, being able to ramp down operations “sensitively”. He also noted reductions in unit costs and sought confirmation that these were not being achieved at the expense of market rates for labour.

D Langhorne explained that constructor partners who had not received a new allocation in 08/09 had been allowed to slip £3.5m worth of completions into the current financial year. This had enabled them to gradually reduce their operations but had still provided some constructors with difficulties and further steps would be taken to support this process. Constructor partners were also being encouraged by YHN to look at opportunities for recruiting staff made redundant by other partners.

With regard to the reductions in unit costs being achieved, D Langhorne acknowledged that there had been some significant reductions but noted that a range of factors, not just labour costs, affected the outturn position. This included the proportion of external and internal work carried out during a period, and the nature of the estates under renovation. It was also highlighted that the success or otherwise of the proposed PFI initiative for Byker Wall would affect overall unit costs, depending on the

outcome of the bid.

It was also confirmed that employment initiatives had been the subject of two dedicated sessions at the Strategic Alliance meeting. D Langhorne noted that to date, the majority of savings had been due to material costs rather than labour rates. The review of the Replacement Rules had also contributed to this. It was also noted that the current pilot at Kingston Park in conjunction with the North East Procurement Consortium had indicated that savings of 10% were achievable through fuller participation with the consortium. It was hoped to progress this as soon as possible and if Board approval was received, to migrate procurement activities through the consortium.

A Committee member acknowledged the initiatives underway. He noted that while it was not for YHN to shoulder responsibility for the economic downturn, it was incumbent upon it to try to minimise the potential adverse affect of its' policies on the local labour market.

- (ii) A committee member queried how much cognisance was paid to qualitative and ethical issues when evaluating tenders. A Gibson noted that YHN generally worked to a 50:50 price/quality split although this could be varied depending on particular circumstances. The Chair suggested that it would be useful to have a report at a future meeting, setting out the basis for evaluation of tenders and allocation of work.

**RESOLVED – That**

- (i) the report be received and comments noted;
- (ii) a report be brought to a future meeting on YHN's policy for allocating work to constructors in terms of the evaluation of quantitative and qualitative factors.

**24. REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE – JOINT PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Submitted: Report by Contract Performance and Development Manager and Finance Manager (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

The Chair reported that in future, YHN Finance Committee would no longer also receive this report. Any significant issues would be referred from Property Committee to Finance Committee as necessary.

N Scott introduced the report which set out the position in terms of performance and the financial position, for the Repairs & Maintenance (R&M) service.

(i).

**Performance Issues :-**

In terms of performance issues the following key points were noted:-

- (a) Six new performance indicators, negotiated with City Build were highlighted in blue on the January 2008 performance information chart. These would be formally adopted from April 2009.
  - (b) Overall performance was good. The percentage of jobs raised on emergency status had met the contract standard for the first time in several months. Measures were being considered to ensure that this position was sustained in the next financial year although it was likely that the outturn to the end of the 2008/09 financial year would be below target.
  - (c) In terms of the ratio of expenditure to planned maintenance, YHN's target was a 50/50 split but this was unlikely to be met this year. However, additional planned maintenance would be implemented in the next financial year. It was hoped that these initiatives would help to ensure the target was met.
  - (d) The percentage of TNI's to repairs raised had also improved.
- (ii) **Financial Position:-** In terms of the overall financial position, the following key points were noted based on information set out in Section 4 of the report.
- (a) At the January 2009 meeting an underspend of £292,000 had been forecast for the R&M budget for the year. Based on latest available data, it was now expected that an underspend of £88,000 would be achieved. This was due to a decrease in the amount of work on void properties, resulting in lower void capitalisation.
  - (b) It had been agreed with City Build that £102,000 would be returned to YHN this financial year, to reflect additional repairs carried out by City Build, which had been invoiced to include overhead recovery, where overhead costs had already been recovered through the original budgeted work. It was confirmed that the reported figures did not include this rebate but the May report would confirm the year end position.

Committee members then raised a number of issues in discussion:-

- A committee member asked for clarification of the 10 day response target for complaint handling. N Scott confirmed that this required that within 10 working days, YHN officers should produce a full response and carry out the required work. If for technical reasons, this target could not be met, then as full a response as possible should be provided and the work carried out as promptly as possible. The Committee member commented that a 98% complaint target was a high required level of performance and the relatively low overall number of complaints meant that a single complaint could have a disproportionate effect on achieved performance.

N Scott explained that the 10 working day target had been agreed following

recommendations from a mock inspection carried out 18 months ago. The Committee member suggested that if circumstances beyond YHN's control meant that a complaint could not be resolved within the target time, it should not be recorded negatively against YHN. N Scott confirmed that cases beyond YHN's control were not counted as failures and the reported figures only represented circumstances where YHN should have met the 10 working day target but did not.

- N Scott confirmed that within the quarter, 67 complaints had been received compared with 33,000 repairs jobs carried out in the period.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received and comments noted.

25. **REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION REPORT  
QUARTER 3 2008/09**

Submitted: Report by Contract Performance and Development Manager (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

N Scott advised that the report provided information on customer satisfaction with the Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) service, including complaints, between October and December 2008.

It was explained that YHN used two survey methodologies to measure customer satisfaction. These comprised a telephone survey using a structured questionnaire and a customer service card left with tenants after each completed repair.

The Committee was advised that during the period, City Build had carried out 34,000 repairs on behalf of YHN. 67 complaints had been received during the same period. Telephone surveys had been carried out in relation to 9% of repairs completed in the period. It was confirmed that this was statistically significant. Furthermore, 8% of tenants who had had repairs completed had returned customer satisfaction cards. In terms of specific survey results, the following key points were noted:-

- The percentage of tenants confirming that they had been offered appointments had reduced from 94% of those surveyed in Q2 2008/09 to 86% in Q3. Furthermore, the percentage of tenants surveyed specifically stating that they had not been offered appointments had increased from 1% in Q2 to 10% in Q3.
- There had been a slight reduction in the percentage of respondents reporting that repairs had been carried out on the first visit. This had reduced from 92% in Q2 to 90% in Q3.
- In terms of the profile of tenants surveyed, 91% were white British and 9% were from BME communities. Of the 9% of BME tenants surveyed, 23% had either stated no preference or had not responded at all to the question

regarding overall satisfaction. This was considered to represent a relatively high proportion of BME tenants failing to express an opinion either way and YHN had therefore decided to investigate why this was the case. It was hoped to bring a report to the May meeting.

A Committee member noted that the question may not be easy to understand. She also queried whether telephone interviewers were posing the question in a clear way and queried whether the National Interpretation Service was being used. She noted that it was important to validate this information and asked for further details.

A Committee member suggested that some tenants may be wary about the implications of providing a negative response. He noted that some may feel vulnerable and YHN needed to understand if this was the case.

N Scott acknowledged these points and agreed to look into the frequency with which YHN used the translation service. He commented that the telephone survey was currently carried out on YHN's behalf by City Build but in due course this service may be taken back in-house.

- 67 complaints had been received during the quarter out of a total of 33,000 repairs completed. Of these, 39 had been upheld.
- In response to a query, it was confirmed that tenants were encouraged to respond by having the opportunity to enter a lottery draw to win a £50 voucher prize.
- In response to a query from a Committee member, it was confirmed that the number of ethnicity categories included in the survey, were standard national categories.
- With regard to question 19 of the telephone survey, a Committee member suggested that this should be amended to read Do You “consider yourself” to have any long standing illness, disability or infirmity ? N Scott agreed to take this point on board.

**RESOLVED** – That

- (i) the report be received and comments noted;
- (ii) a report be brought back to the May meeting on work carried out to investigate responses received from BME tenants.

**26. AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS REVIEW**

Submitted: Report by Investment Delivery Manager (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

D Langhorne introduced this report which provided Property Committee with information on the work being carried out to review the Aids and Adaptations process.

The Committee was informed that following recommendations in a recent Audit Commission inspection, YHN had asked Tribal Consulting to review its Aids and Adaptations process, policies, structures and budget. The brief for the service review as set out in section 2.2 of the report was noted. As a result, areas identified as key actions for YHN had been reviewed, and an Aids and Adaptations workstream had been created to take these forward.

The workstream, established in January 2009, was being jointly led by J Vinton, YHN Investment Delivery Manager and J Urwin, Manager of Your Choice Homes. This would develop guidelines on the level of support that YHN could offer as well clearly establishing what YHN would not be able to provide. It was accepted that a balance needed to be struck. The main products for the workstream, reflecting the key actions/areas identified by the Tribal review, were noted to comprise policy procedures; options and access; budget optimisation; asset plan; and structure.

It was confirmed that a report would be brought back to Property Committee when the workstream review process was complete. In response to a query D Langhorne confirmed that it was not yet possible to confirm the timescale for the review as the workstream had only very recently met. However, he agreed to ask J Vinton to prepare a report with an initial proposed timescale and summary Project Plan.

**RESOLVED** – That

- (i) the report be received and comments noted;
- (ii) J Vinton be asked to prepare a summary report with an initial timeline and summary project plan.

**27. SAMPLE WINDOWS FOR MULTIS**

A sample of the proposed UPVC windows for use in multi storey blocks was on display for the Committee to inspect. A Gibson explained that these may be used in a pilot at Vale House. However, this was dependent on the outcome of the ongoing dispute regarding the use of aluminium framed windows at Heaton Park Court, Molineux and Grafton Court. The Committee was informed that a sub-group of the Tenants Association had raised a complaint regarding the quality of the aluminium windows installed at those blocks. They had then subsequently commissioned their own independent survey which had been critical of the installation. However, in YHN's opinion, the quality of the findings had not been robust, and YHN had decided to commission its own independent survey.

It was explained that the results of YHN's survey were expected very soon. However, if this deemed the windows to be fit for purpose, then YHN may decide to continue to install aluminium fittings. The UPVC framework had potentially offered a saving of £100,000 over the original cost of the aluminium installations. However, the aluminium manufacturers had now come back and informed YHN that they would price match any UPVC installation.

As a result, it was confirmed that no decision regarding UPVC or aluminium window frames would be taken at the meeting.

At this stage R Renton left the meeting. (5.50 pm)

A Gibson sought confirmation from the Committee that it agreed in principle to the commissioning of a pilot using UPVC windows at Vale House. D Langhorne noted that the proposed move to using UPVC casements had originally been driven by a need to reduce costs. However, if aluminium fittings were deemed to be fit purpose and the manufacturers matched UPVC costs, then YHN may choose to continue with aluminium installations in multi storey blocks. At this stage, no decision could be taken.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received and the Committee's agreement in principle be given to the commissioning of a pilot installation of UPVC windows at Vale House.

## 28. **REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACT – CLAIMS**

Submitted: Report by Director of Tenancy Services (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

N Scott introduced the report. He explained that the report examined three issues which had been the subject of ongoing consultation with City Build. These were explained as follows:-

- (i) additional payments claimed by City Build arising from the change to a 46 week gas servicing programme;
- (ii) a claim for additional payments by City Build for works associated with cleaning and clearing void properties; and
- (iii) a claim by YHN that City Build should offer discounts where overhead payments have been charged at the full rate but most or all of the overhead costs has already been recovered.

Three key areas for review were noted for the Committee's information as follows:

- (a) Gas Servicing – YHN had established with City Build the level of

resource required to deliver the 46 week annual gas servicing programme. YHN accepted that initially there had been extra costs to City Build but this was now no longer sustainable. Moving forward, it was therefore proposed that a charge, capped at £15 per property, should be payable by YHN for any additional services carried out within a financial year. This would result in a reduction in additional payments made by YHN from £253,000 to approximately £43,000 per annum. The reduced budget would be effective from 1 April 2009. The proposed changes would result in costs of £102,000 being recouped in the 2008/09 financial year and further savings in 2009/10 of approximately £62,000.

- (b) Cleaning and Clearance of Void Properties – N Scott explained that YHN had reviewed with City Build the Schedule of Rates and descriptions of activities to be carried out. Primarily, these related to garden clearance, property cleaning and property clearing. In the past, administration of this work had been difficult and therefore YHN felt it was appropriate to revisit the submission from City Build. As a result, an assessment of the full year financial consequences for applying the changes, proposed, would lead to additional costs of the order of £145,000, assuming that the number and type of voids being processed would remain fairly constant. If the proposed changes were adopted, YHN would cap additional expenditure at £145,000 with any increase only being sanctioned on the basis of a significant increase in void numbers and subject to submission of a supporting business case.
- (c) YHN claim for City Build to offer discounted rates – N Scott explained that YHN would be seeking to recover expenditure paid to City Build where City Build had already fully recovered its overhead costs. This was particularly relevant where additional work was carried out over and above that forecast in a financial year. In addition, YHN was also considering the impact of the increasing use of Rapid Response on the R&M budgets. Following approval at the January 2009 by Property Committee to review the current repair timescales and priorities, YHN had agreed with City Build to limit charges for Rapid Response work to 2007/08 levels until the review was completed.

Committee members then raised a number of questions in discussion:-

- A Committee member queried whether the costs associated with garden clearance and clearing of void properties were always levied against the former tenant. He queried whether housing managers had some discretion about how charges were applied depending on the age, health etc of the tenant.

N Scott confirmed that although there was some flexibility, in most cases an invoice would be raised. However, YHN could support tenants through use of Envirocall and the rapid response bulky clearance service. He also noted

that if there was genuine ill health and no relatives were available to assist with the clearing and tidying of the property, and/or there were instances of genuine hardship, then YHN may waive part of the charge. In the first instance, authority for such a decision lay with the relevant housing manager. However, it was confirmed that tenants did have the right of appeal to the next level of line manager.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received and the following recommendations approved:-

- (i) to reduce the 2009/10 gas servicing budget by £206,500 from the 2008/2009 levels;
- (ii) to accept the claim from City Bid for additional expenditure for cleaning and clearing of voids, effective from 1 April 2009 with a cap on annual expenditure (above current levels) of £145,000;
- (iii) to accept the discount of £102,500 proposed by City Build for Responsive Repairs and Rapid Response for 2008/2009 and to cap the costs of Rapid Response at 2007/08 levels pending review of this service.

29. **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

**RESOLVED** – That the next meeting of YHN Property Committee take place on Monday, 18 May 2009 at 5.00 pm at YHN House.

30. **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED** – That the press and public be excluded during consideration of agenda item no. 12 “Confidential Minutes”.

31. **CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2009**

**RESOLVED** – That the confidential minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2009 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.