



## **Board**

**27 January 2009**

### **Items for Information**

#### **1. Introduction**

The attached are for information:

- (i) Health and Safety quarterly report
- (ii) Delegated Decisions 1 5 December 2008 to 19 January 2009
- (iii) Petitions
- (iv) Minutes :
  - Outer West & North Area Board held on 10 November 2008
  - Inner West Area Board held on 11 November 2008
  - Audit Committee held on 12 November 2008
  - East Area Board held on 13 November 2008
  - Property Committee held on 17 November 2008

#### **2. Recommendation**

Board is asked to receive these items for information.

#### **Contact Officer:**

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



## Board

**27 January 2009**

### Quarterly Health and Safety Report

**Report by: Director of Finance and Resources (Health & Safety Champion)**

For Information		
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#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report informs Board of the current position with regard to accident/incident statistics, health and safety training and work in progress within the area of employee operational safety and assets and programming.

#### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Board is recommended to note this report for information.

#### 3. Key Issues

- 3.1 The Fire Safety Officer is continuing a prioritised programme of fire risk assessments to ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The programme for 2008/09 is on track and continues to focus on the requirement for fire risk assessments for communal areas of sheltered housing schemes and blocks of flats. The fire safety officer is also giving technical advice at early stages of projects when requested.

A programme of fire safety improvements has been approved by Board and commenced on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2009.

- 3.2 A number of training sessions have been held (see para 5.3). Feedback from employees has been positive and attendance has been high.
- 3.3 A number of health and safety inspections have been carried out in the period (see para 5.4). Following inspections of YHN premises, feedback is given to managers via a written report and a traffic light monitoring report. Recommendations are tracked to ensure progress against health and safety indicators.

#### 4. **Your Homes Newcastle Strategic Objectives**

4.1 The management of health and safety and the regular monitoring of health and safety performance of employees contributes to the objectives of:-

- Support and care to communities
- Three star excellent services
- A quality workforce
- Refurbishing and building homes

#### 5. **Summary**

5.1 Accident statistics – 1 October to 31 December 2008.

There were 16 accidents to employees reported in the period.

Four involved slips/trips, six involved manual handling, four were due to a moving or falling object (including one minor road traffic accident) and two were other types of accident. Most resulted in minor injuries but two manual handling accidents were reportable to the Health and Safety Executive as the employees were absent from work for more than three days following manual handling injuries.

5.2 Incident statistics – 1 October to 31 December 2008

There were 14 incidents reported during the period.

All incidents involved verbal abuse and/or anti social behaviour to employees by tenants or an applicant. Five of these being verbal abuse during a telephone call. The tenants involved have received letters regarding their unacceptable behaviour from the local manager and/or HASBET and some have had a PRI placed on the internal system.

5.3 Health and Safety Training – 1 October to 31 December 2008

In accordance with the YHN training plan the following courses have been delivered by the Senior Health and Safety Officer and contracted trainers.

- Display Screen Equipment x 3 sessions – 39 employees
- Fire Safety Awareness – 13 employees
- IOSH 'Working Safely' x 2 sessions – 22 employees
- Moving and Handling training x 2 sessions – 9 employees
- Sharps Awareness x 2 sessions – 16 employees
- Emergency first Aid appointed persons training x 6 sessions – 43 employees
- Personal Safety training x 3 sessions – 43 employees
- Certificate in Leading Teams – 7 employees

#### 5.4 Health and safety inspections – 1 October to 31 December 2008

The following premises/services were inspected during the period:

- Hexham House sheltered housing scheme
- Stepping Stones, Gosforth
- Monkchester Green Bungalows – communal areas
- Welbeck Green Bungalows – communal areas
- Allendale House sheltered housing scheme
- Keebledale House sheltered housing scheme
- Avondale House sheltered housing scheme
- Mount Pleasant House sheltered housing scheme
- Theresa Russell House sheltered housing scheme

The inspection and traffic light reports have been sent out to the relevant manager and will be followed up as part of the monitoring and review process.

#### 6. **Consultation**

- 6.1 The consultation process with staff side health and safety representatives continues to work well with meetings held quarterly.

#### 7. **Work in Progress**

- 7.1 Planned work for 2008/2009 includes health and safety inspections, fire risk assessments on communal areas of sheltered schemes and blocks of flats, reviewing and updating employee risk assessments with the relevant managers and developing, revising and updating Your Homes Newcastle health and safety Codes of Practice. This work is progressing according to schedule. Planning for 2009/10 is now in progress.
- 7.2 Health and Safety training is ongoing as per the agreed schedule.

#### 8. **Assets and Programming update**

- 8.1 Construction, Design and Maintenance (CDM)

Peter McFaul has taken on the role of the CDM Co-ordinator role within assets & programming. A traffic light system spreadsheet is issued to NCC (client) on a monthly basis on both notifiable and non-notifiable projects to ensure both YHN & NCC are fulfilling their duties under the Construction (Design & Maintenance) regulations 2007.

- 8.2 Asbestos Management

Approximately 85% of properties under the decent homes programme have been surveyed.

All offices and communal areas to all other buildings e.g. sheltered and multi storey buildings have had a Type 2 asbestos survey carried out.

### 8.3 Legionella management

Controls are in place for all premises. Remedial works to sheltered accommodation is now completed. Multi Storey Building remedial works is in progress with tenders being sought.

Several CHO offices have moved / merged and a review is now needed to re-assess controls. The mechanical & Electrical section in repairs & maintenance will carry this out by April 2009.

The change to YHN Property Services Management structure is to be updated in policy documents by April 2009.

## 9. Next steps

9.1 Board will receive the next quarterly report in April 2009.

### Contact Officer(s):

Ross Atkinson	Director of Finance and Resources Health and Safety Champion	Ext 28708
Karen Timms	Senior Health and Safety Officer	Ext 28725
Paul Hickey	Manager, Central Services	Ext 28665
Peter McFaul	Construction Risk & Safety Manager	Ext 27744

**Background Papers** – held by Senior Health and Safety Officer, First Floor, YHN House

**Board**

**16 December 2008**

**Delegated Decisions – Schedule of non-confidential Delegated Decisions taken between 5 December 2008 and 19 January 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	12/9/2008	Saville Row Refurbishment	Funding of the total expenditure amounting to £90,706.45 will be met from Office Accommodation Programme.	Westgate
2.	<b>Your Homes Newcastle</b> Scott Neil - Head of Housing Management	12/10/2008	NFS Stock management system	Cost £7,500 Code 1YTA1/D553	All Wards
3.	<b>Your Homes Newcastle</b> Scott Neil - Head of Housing Management	12/12/2008	Byker Wall Concrete Repairs	Funding of the total expenditure amounting to £12,579.05 will be met from YHN R & M Minor Works Budget.	Byker
4.	<b>Your Homes Newcastle</b> Atkinson Ross - (YHN Head of Corporate Service)	12/12/2008	The installation of a partition wall system to create a new enclosed meeting room. The new meeting room will be situated on the second floor within the current IT section.	Cost - £2,188.60 Code - 1YCSA / B312	All Wards

5.	<b>Your Homes Newcastle</b> Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	12/15/2008	Dunstanburgh Close Environmental Improvements	Funding of the total expenditure amounting to £ 60,430.98	Byker
6.	<b>Your Homes Newcastle</b> Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	12/15/2008	Alston Avenue Car Park	Funding of the total expenditure amounting to £11,432 will be met from Housing Project Fund.	Byker
7.	<b>Your Homes Newcastle</b> Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	1/13/2009	Lifts - Health and Safety Improvements Programme 2008/09	Funding of the total expenditure amounting to £122,335 will be met from Housing Investment Programme.	All Wards
8.	<b>Your Homes Newcastle</b> Lee John - YHN Chief Executive	1/13/2009	Protective roof decking to drying area at Mill House	Funding of the total expenditure amounting to £21,320 will be met from DHS Modern Homes Other Programme.	Wingrove
9.	<b>Your Homes Newcastle</b> Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	1/13/2009	Floor slab replacement and stabilisation 165 Hallow Drive.	Funding of the total expenditure amounting to £12,449.73 will be met from One Off Structural Fund.	Newburn

**Board****27 January 2009****Petitions Monitoring**

<b>Petitioners:</b>	<b>Residents of South West Denton</b>		
<b>Received:</b>	5 December 2008	<b>Response:</b>	18 December 2008
<b>Issues:</b>	Petition relating to problems regarding improvement works that had been carried out to their homes. The main problems were with combi boilers, draughts, drains and electrics.		
<b>Response:</b>	City Design has investigated the issues raised and Petitioners informed that visits will be set up to resolve the different issues.		



Your Homes Newcastle Outer West and North Area Board

10 November 2008

(5.30 pm – 7.00pm )

**Present:**

M Brennan (In the Chair)

E Lough, M Nellis, B Drury, G Allison and K Best

**In Attendance:**

M Morris - Your Homes Newcastle  
D Grey - Your Homes Newcastle  
S Freed - Your Homes Newcastle  
R Smithson - Democratic Services

**56 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting with officers and members introducing themselves.

**57. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from I Laverick, P Mains, L Henry and J Foley.

**58. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2008**

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

**Matters Arising:**

**(a) Newbiggin Hall Gating Scheme**

M Morris highlighted that since the last meeting the issue with regard to the gating order had been looked into with the City Council officer. Delays had been due to Newcastle City Council not having a legal procedure in place for establishing a gating scheme. Action was now taking place and it was hoped the scheme would proceed

with an application being made in January 2009.

(b) **Service Standards**

M Morris highlighted that on the concierge service issues raised at the last meeting he had contacted the manager of that service who confirmed that adequate cover was in place in regard to covering sickness absence.

59. **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING**

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

M Morris outlined the report as attached. It was noted that in August and September targets had been exceeded including

- Satisfaction with repairs and maintenance
- Cases referred to HASBET and dealt with within the timescales set
- Number of void properties available to let

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

- Programme investment packages delivered
- Number of homes made decent

Targets had not been achieved for

- Reduction in rent arrears
- Satisfaction with the investment programme
- Average re-let time

On satisfaction with the investment programme, S Freed expressed her own disappointment with the figures and she was particularly concerned that there was no particular problem she was aware of which would cause a dip in performance. There was concern however that tenants may be using the surveys to express dissatisfaction over other services or delays rather than the quality of the decent homes work carried out.

On programme investment package S Freed highlighted that due to the nature of the constructors working timetables she was confident that targets would be achieved by the year end.

On voids re-let time M Morris explained that there was one particular property which had particularly affected the average re-let time. Once this property was removed the average re-let time for the Outer West and North area should improve significantly.

On the reduction of rent arrears M Morris highlighted the action which was being taken to address the fall in performance. It included sampling of officers case management of arrears being undertaken to better understand the reasons for the ongoing increase in arrears. At citywide and Outer West and North level work is underway to promote best practice in arrears recovery and management and refresher training is arranged for all officers involved in arrears recovery. A Citywide promotional campaign is being planned to address the impact of the wider economic downturn for increasing benefit take-up and offer advice on budgeting to our tenants.

A member highlighted that the Credit Union should be involved in the campaign as it would help inform residents of where they could obtain cheap credit rather than taking out high interest loans. M Morris confirmed this was being considered.

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

60. **SERVICE STANDARD MONITORING**

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

M Morris outlined the report as attached. In August and September the Young People Service and the Modern Homes Programme had been monitored.

The Young Peoples Services all standards were green except for the standard (we will provide accreditation service so that 75% of young people and supported in tenancies can gain recognition and qualifications for the skills and abilities they have and can rejoin education and get qualifications for their skills and experience). M Morris explained that the reason for performance slippage was due to the adoption of a new accreditation agency. The Young People's Service had completed the necessary work as planned but these had not been yet been accredited.

For the Modern Homes Services standards, all were green except for the standard (we aim for 90% of customers to be satisfied with the work we have done on the modern homes programme during 08/09.)

This would be addressed in the separate report item by S Freed.

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

61 **MODERN HOMES STANDARDS INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 08/09**

Submitted: Report by Area Investment Manager (previously circulated and copy

attached to Official Minutes).

S Freed outlined the report as attached. New starts were outlined including

- Estate 320 for the Fawdon Unities with internal work to 171 units
- Estate 317 in Etal, Radner and Cragstone Park for external work to 139 units. Completions included
- Estate 334 – North Kenton fall in with external works to 40 units
- Estate 553 – West Denton F&G roads with internal works to 204 units

On Customer Surveys S Freed expressed her dissatisfaction with results, as previously mentioned there were no particular problems with any construction works that she was aware of which may have affected results. It was however noted that internal works were known for getting poor satisfaction results not necessarily due to the work itself but the disruption caused as opposed to the external works. There was also concern that tenants were using surveys for the modern homes standards work to express dissatisfaction with other problems. One suggestion S Freed highlighted she would like to see implemented was survey data assessed separately for internal and external packages and possibly with a lower target for internal works.

A member suggested that the survey questions should be more specific to the decent homes work to limit tenants in using it to complain about other issues.

A member expressed concern that the benchmarking put so much weight on the surveys if they were felt to be unsound and there was a possibility of one contractor being blamed for delays caused by another. He noted the issue and highlighted he would raise it at Property Committee.

A member asked if all surveys were done by telephone. S Freed confirmed that this was the case although occasionally some would be done by post.

The decision to demolish Fawdon Park House was noted by members but members discussed the retention of another block of flats in North Kenton which were being refurbished inside to make them fit for purpose. Members asked for a visit to these flats with S Freed suggesting that it may be appropriate during the stepping stones process.

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

## 62. **AREA BOARD MEMBERSHIP**

Submitted: Report by Director of Finance and Resources and Company Secretary (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

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

63 **REVIEW OF AREA BOARDS**

Submitted: Report by Head of Housing Management (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

M Morris outlined the report as attached.

During 2008 YHN Board agreed the recommendation to set out a time limited committee to carry out a review of Area Boards and recommended that the tenant and independent board members did not stand down in 08 and that membership rollover until the review was concluded. The report was remitted to the July round of Area Boards for information.

A number of issues which were identified were due to be addressed as part of the review process. It included

- Membership and attendance
- Communication
- Powers of Area Boards

As part of the review process Area Board members were asked to complete a SWOT analysis. It was hoped this exercise would help capture the strengths and weaknesses of the current Area Board arrangements and should help to identify the role of Area Boards for the future. Area Board members were asked to spend 20 minutes completing the exercise as a group. A note of these was made by the Principal Housing Manager.

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

64 **AREA PROJECT FUND**

Submitted: Report by M Morris (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

M Morris outlined the report as attached. He highlighted Appendix 1 and outlined the call in date for revenue budget and capital budget of a £233,600 budget available. Details of individual projects were outlined in Appendix 2.

A member asked if more information could be provided in the report on what stage these projects were at before they were completed. M Morris agreed to provide this data.

A member asked if funding was committed for this financial year. M Morris highlighted that December was the final submission deadline however he was aware of many projects being assessed currently for the remaining funding.

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

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

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on 19 January 2009, venue to be confirmed.

## Inner West Area Board

11 November 2008  
(5.30 pm – 7.10 pm)

### Present:

G Knox (in the Chair)

Councillor James

A Morris

M Adjei-Mensah

### In Attendance:

S Bagnall	Your Homes Newcastle
K Bryant	Your Homes Newcastle
S Patterson	Your Homes Newcastle
P Moody	Democratic Services

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Renton and Stephenson and P Stafford.

### 2 RESIGNATION FROM AREA BOARD

It was mentioned that G Hind had resigned from the Area Board.

### 3 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 9 September 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### Matters Arising:-

(a) **Concierge – Service Standard Monitoring**

(Minute no. 6 refers).

Reference was made to the situation with regard to the use of the “blue indicator” and “red indicators” as referred to in this minute.

**(b) Your Choice Homes – Service Standards**

(Minute no. 6 refers).

The use of “117” in connection with service standards was clarified.

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

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

Reference was made to the following issues:-

**(a) Schemes Currently On Site**

**(i) Estate 124**

It was commented that a number of doors had not been replaced as the decency standard was already being met.

**(ii) Estate 135 – Scotswood – Internal Work to 584 Properties**

Good progress had been made. The number remaining to be done was down to 50.

**(iii) Ryehill East (Summerhill) – Internal Work**

The report referred to two properties having Grade II Listed Building status, but it was now known that some additional properties were also Listed.

**(iv) Estate 214 – St Cuthbert’s Green**

It was commented that this contract was now complete.

**(v) Estate 216.1 – Blackett Ward Bungalows**

It was indicated that a tenant had raised issues about the windows in the property and as a result it had been agreed to use UPVC as a pilot and the result would be assessed.

(vi) **Estate 224 – Queens Court**

It was commented that a goodwill payment had been made to residents in view of the necessity to turn off the heating in the properties between July and October 2008. Reference was made to the steps taken to ensure that residents had heating.

(b) **Schemes Completed**

(i) **Estate 132 – Ryehill Central**

It was commented that the long term void work was continuing and the letting of the properties was going well.

(ii) **Estate 111 – St John’s Estate**

It was noted that there had been a programme for the contractor to revisit properties where there had been issues with the works carried out. It was not felt that there had been any danger issues associated with the properties.

D James referred to problems that had been drawn to her attention about various properties. There was a meeting on the issue on the day following this Area Board meeting and it was hoped that there would be a satisfactory outcome. Reference was also made to the attitude of the workmen in the particular properties and to the heating system fitted in the properties being needed to be checked.

S Bagnall referred to various problems associated with the properties arising from the split level nature of them and a problem arising from this being the particular contractors last contract. It was confirmed that the heating and boilers had been checked and found to be satisfactory.

(iii) **New Mills Estate – Conversion of 20 Flats into 10 Three Bedroomed Houses**

It was commented that the contract had been a huge success. It had transformed the look of the estate and all the properties had been sold. It was indicated that arrangements would be made for members of the Area Board to visit the properties.

(c) **Schemes Due to Start on Site**

(i) **Estate 217 – Blckett Ord Houses**

It was commented that this had started on site the day before the meeting.

(d) **Customer Satisfaction Details**

(i) **Estate 111 – St John’s Estate**

In answer to a comment regarding the low satisfaction associated with this scheme and to a suggestion that the contractor should have been warned earlier, it was indicated that YHN attempted to be severe with the contractors when the need arose and this had happened in respect of a number of contracts.

**RESOLVED** – That the Area Board would like to see a report back on the results of the meeting to be held on day following this meeting.

5 **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING**

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Business was introduced by K Bryant.

Reference was made to the following aspects:-

- With regard to the Inner West area performance indicator traffic lights summary, it was noted that there were seven areas where a red light was shown in connection with the performance against target and in five out of the eight areas, the performance trend was declining when compared with the previous quarter.
- In connection with satisfaction with repairs and maintenance, D James referred to a particular issue where workmen had failed to secure a steel door and she had had to intervene to insist on the works being carried out.
- With regard to satisfaction with the investment programme, it was commented that the direction of travel was upwards.
- With regard to the programmed investment packages delivered, it was commented that the direction of travel was downwards, but no corrective action was required as performance was determined by the programme identified by the contractors.
- With regard to the number of homes made decent, the direction of travel was downwards and the issue here was the same as for the programmed investment packages delivered.
- With regard to the voids re-let time, it was commented that although the average re-let time had dropped this was still below the area target of 35 days. Reference was made to properties in Fenham which had suffered

slight movement and repairs were to be started.

- Reference was made to the works carried out when a new tenant moved in. It was commented that all essential repairs should be done before a new tenant moved in, although if work was not covered in the Modern Homes Standard, the works would not be carried out.
- With regard to the number of void properties available to let, it was commented that the figure had reduced to 67 with the area target being 71.
- It was asked what the numbers were on the housing waiting list and it was commented that the approximate figure was 9,000. Information could be provided for the Elswick/Westgate area. It was asked that the information be provided at the next meeting including the number of priority card holders (homeless and medical).
- It was commented that because Hill Court was within the Inner West Area that would appear to swell the numbers.
- With regard to the reduction in rent arrears, it was commented that the direction of travel was downwards. Rent arrears refresher training for staff had recently started. D James commented on situations where a spouse or partner had not known about arrears until the day of the eviction. In answer to this it was commented that there was a prevention of eviction protocol and staff would be expected to act in accordance with that. The matter was the responsibility of the tenant and YHN had to deal with the tenant.
- With regard to advertising campaigns, it was hoped that information would be given to help tenants to maximise their income and that information would also be given about where to obtain debt advice.
- With regard to the percentage of cases referred HASBET within the timescales, it was commented that the direction of travel was upwards and there had been an improvement in the Inner West Area.

**RESOLVED** – That the figures referred to above regarding the Housing Waiting List be provided at the next meeting.

## 6 **SERVICE STANDARD MONITORING**

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Business was introduced by K Bryant. It was noted that in Quarter 2, there were seven green traffic lights and an amber and a red light.

The report indicated that from May 2008 reports had begun on service standards on a rotational basis with the young people's service being mentioned for November 2008. In this regard the Chair asked that this be referred to in the review.

## 7 REVIEW OF AREA BOARDS

The report of the Head of Housing Management indicated that the Board had agreed that the review of Area Boards should be carried out. The issues which had been identified were:-

- Membership and attendance – difficulties in recruiting and sustaining attendance.
- Communication – main Board agenda, minutes and the Chair's report as circulated to Area Board members. Quarterly meetings with the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Area Boards and the Chair of the Board were set up, but were not well attended.
- Powers of Area Boards – Area Boards do not have any decision making powers and have been unable to develop an effective local perspective. This is evidenced by the lack of public attendance at meetings.

Members then participated in a SWOT analysis and K Bryant noted the responses which would be fed into the review process.

Amongst the comments made, there was:-

- The Area Boards had no possibility of influencing targets.
- The Area Boards monitored targets that they had no input in setting.
- The Area Boards suffered from a lack of power, for example, there was no discretionary funding.
- The Area Boards were a mechanism by which real needs could be fed in although input from a Tenants Group would be an alternative method of doing that.
- It was not clear why there were Independent Members on Area Boards, although another member commented that an Independent Members employment background allowed them to understand better the issues.
- The Area Board members should all be points of contact for tenants who wished issues to be raised. The lack of tenant involvement was perhaps a failure.
- The Board Sub-Committees were where Area Board members could develop their skills and in that regard, a member felt that it was surprising that she had never been asked to join a Sub-Committee.

- It was felt to be a strength that the Area Board had a good mix of skills, although it was felt to be of concern that there was very little that they could do.
- It was felt to be a fact that the Area Board was not functioning at a high enough level, although it was felt that local people did know of the Area Board.
- It was felt that the Area Board could have been a Sub-Committee of the Board with more delegated powers. This could be referred to as an opportunity.
- It was felt to be a better use of the Area Boards in time in appropriate cases if time was found to do a particular piece of work with the results being fed into the main Board.

## 8 **AREA BOARD MEMBERSHIP**

The report of the Director of Finance and Resources and Company Secretary was introduced by K Bryant.

The report referred to the issue of whether main Board representatives on Area Boards formed part of the constituent groups and therefore whether their attendance counted towards the quorum requirements.

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

## **Audit Committee**

12 November 2008

(5.15 pm – 6.50 pm)

### **Present:**

R Harral (In the Chair)

G Knox

J Dallinson

J Cuthbertson

G Allison

### **In Attendance:**

R Atkinson - Director of Finance and Resources  
A Lister - Finance Manager – Technical and Procurement  
J Miller - Democratic Services

### **Observers:**

G Clark - Audit Commission  
R Morris - Audit Commission

## 11 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from J Common, L Stephenson and P J Morrisey.

## 12. **MINUTES**

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

## 13. **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.

**C/14. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES**

The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2008 were approved as a correct record. It was agreed that they should also be submitted to the next ordinary meeting of the Audit Committee to allow consideration of the matters arising.

**OPEN SESSION**

**15. REVIEW OF ACTION PLAN**

Submitted: Your Homes Newcastle Audit Committee – Action Plan (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

It was explained that the purpose of this meeting was to look at the action plan that had been produced after the training workshop in more detail and to discuss how best to take it forward.

G Clark, fed back on how the Committee had functioned at its last meeting following the training workshop. He commented that progress had clearly been made although some issues had not been picked up by the Committee when considering the internal audit reports, but overall the Committee had been more challenging. The Committee should feel able to constructively challenge to help them undertake what they were charged to deliver. Members should feel they could ask questions without feeling unsure. The Committee needed to ensure that it was provided with the right information to enable it to do its job. It was expected that further progress would be seen at the next meeting, with the report format being amended to take account of members comments at the October 2008 meeting following the training workshop.

G Clark undertook to circulate his written feedback on how the last meeting had operated to members.

Members discussed the outcomes from the training workshop and the following issues/queries were raised during debate:-

- It was clear from the workshop that the Committee did not feel it had a defined purpose.
- It was important to get the foundations right and build from that which was the purpose of the action plan.
- It was recognised that action (ii) would need to be done in conjunction with the Chair of the Board.

- the Committee should decide which issues it wished to target and look at fewer issues in more depth, i.e. a more targeted approach.
- The first stage would be to establish the purpose of the Committee, the detail of the operation of the Committee would follow on from this.
- It was agreed that in future, members would have a half an hour pre meeting immediately prior to the Committee which would operate on the assumption that members had read all the reports.

### **Way Forward – Action Plan**

Members discussed their work on clarifying/developing the role of the Audit Committee within the context of the overall review of the YHN Committee structure which the Chair of Board was to lead. They did discuss whether it would be necessary to await the outcome of that review before undertaking the review of the Audit Committee or whether the Audit Committee could decide upon its role and feed that into the review.

- The Audit Committee should sit alongside the YHN organisation and report to Board on areas which were not working properly.
- The Committee needed to be sure that all the relevant internal controls were working to protect YHN.
- In relation to the terms of reference, the Committee needed to be clear on how it dealt with the final three bullet points i.e.:-
  - (i) to monitor and review the effectiveness of YHN's internal audit function;
  - (ii) to review YHN's internal financial control system;
  - (iii) to review YHN's risk management systems.
- The reference to “internal financial control systems” should refer to “internal control systems” as the work of the Audit Committee covered all control systems not just the financial system.
- There was some overlap between the role of Audit Committee and the role of Governance and Personnel Committees.
- The only exception were Audit Committee should be proactive was in relation to the very specific rule of “those charged with governance”.

- In terms of the Audit Committee role/function, consideration would need to be given to:-
  - what the Committee should be doing;
  - any problems relating to that;
  - any gaps;
  - any areas of duplication.
- One role of the Committee was to monitor the relationship between Internal Audit and Management. Internal Audit should be independent of management and part of the role of the Committee was to challenge/confirm whether that was the case.
- Audit Committee should not receive full internal audit reports, but rather the details of why an audit had been undertaken, the recommendations from the audit, details of how management had responded to those recommendations and whether there were any recommendations which management had refused to implement. The Committee should not get involved in the detail as this was the responsibility of management. It was important to ensure the focus of the Committee was right.
- The Committee needed to be assured that there was proper liaison between Internal and External Audit.
- It was acknowledged that the Audit Committee needed to have a relationship with the Audit Commission as they undertook the external audit of the HRA. This needed to be reflected in the action plan as an issue to be followed up. Newcastle City Council Audit Committee gave an opinion of the HRA that YHN Audit Committee played a clear role in that through agreeing the Statement on Internal Control, which was then signed off by the Chief Executive of YHN. In addition, R Atkinson had a monthly section 151 meeting with Newcastle City Treasurer. This Committee could provide greater scrutiny of the HRA than the City Council Audit Committee and could review the controls and systems of the HRA in more detail.
- The action plan should refer to the need to make clear the relationship of YHN Audit Committee with others e.g. Audit Commission and Newcastle City Council Audit Committee, YHN Management Team etc.
- The Committee needed to be provided with information on the sampling of YHN records of major systems so they could come to a conclusion as to whether they felt this was adequate. This was particularly important as YHN had a different risk environment to the City Council.

- It was acknowledged that there was a very complex relationship between YHN and Newcastle City Council in terms of assurance.
- If YHN Audit Committee had a serious concern in relation to a particular control, they would draw it to the attention of the Board.
- The training session and this debate had helped to identify the areas where the Committees purpose was not clear which was partly due to the variety of relationships with External Audit and the Audit Commission. The overall purpose of the Committee needed to be drafted taking into account all of these and bringing them together.
- It was felt that the way forward had to be the overall review of YHN Committee by the Chair, followed by the review of the terms of reference and purpose of the Audit Committee within the context of the overall Committee structure. In the interim before the review, clarification could be sought on the key relations rather than proposing significant change at this stage.
- In terms of taking forward the action plan, G Clark/R Morris would amend it taking into account the issues highlighted by the discussion.
- It was agreed that the order of the items in the action plan should be amended so that item (i) should become item (ii) and vice versa. Item (iv) would be rephrased taking into account the Committees “unusual” relationship with the City Council.
- In addition to having clear terms of reference and it was intended to have the means of delivering on those terms of reference.
- It was clarified that the internal audit reports that were submitted to Committee were the full internal audit report, however, they did not include a description of all the work that had been undertaken both on the scope of an audit. They contained the issues Internal Audit wished to bring to management’s attention as the result of an audit.
- The Committee would therefore need to consider what it wanted/needed from Internal Audit reports i.e.:-
  - information on why a particular area had been looked at;
  - was there anything for the Committee to be concerned about.

## **Conclusions/Next Steps**

- There was a need for clarity on the relationship between External Audit, Internal Audit and the Audit Commission. The Committee needed to be clear regarding the sum of those outcomes.
- The Committee had a responsibility in the way it dealt with reports and questioned Internal Audit to ensure that the work presented to the Committee enabled it to carry out its function.
- A Lister pointed out that the Audit Committee did influence and approve the Internal Audit plan which was informed via the Strategic Risk Register and brought to Committee for their input before it was finalised.
- It was queried whether the Committee should be involved in developing the scope of audits. R Morris stressed that it was important that Audit Committee did not direct the audits, however, when considering the audit plan it was relevant to question why timescale and issues covered by the plan. The role of the Audit Committee was to approve the Audit Plan based on an understanding of the extent to which the plan addressed the risks to the organisation. This could be written into the Committees terms of reference.
- Consideration would need to be given to whether it was felt the internal audit service was adequately geared up to deal with the commercial aspects of YHN business e.g. the furniture service. If there were specific specialist audits,, it was possible to procure the services of specialist auditors.
- It was agreed that in future an action list as well as minutes be produced for Audit Committee. The action list to include columns for item, action required, who was responsible and timescale for completion. This should help the Committee to identify what had been done and what had not been done.
- The key issue to bear in mind was that the role of the Audit Committee was not “directing work”, but assessing whether the internal control process was working satisfactorily.
- R Atkinson was meeting with Ernst and Young (external auditors) and P Taylor (Head of Internal Audit) in the near future. He undertook to invite C Yrrell (Audit Commission) and the Chair of YHN Audit Committee to a meeting.
- It was recognised that the Committee itself could not change its purpose/terms of reference, it could make suggestions for changes, but these would have to be formally agreed by the Board.
- It was agreed that the next step would be for R Morris/G Clark to reissue an amended action plan based on the discussions at the meeting and also to

provide examples of purposes in terms of reference of Audit Committee.

## Your Homes Newcastle – Area Board East

13 November 2008

(5.00 pm – 6.30 pm)

### Present:

R Harral (In the Chair)

D Besag

C Harvey

V Dunn

H Warren

### In Attendance:

T Healy - Your Homes Newcastle

H Sammut  
Smith - Your Homes Newcastle

S Dunlop - Your Homes Newcastle

A Kerr - Your Homes Newcastle

J Miller - Democratic Services

## 1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from D Warman, J Stokel-Walker and A Todd-Mills.

## 2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 11 September 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## **Matter Arising:-**

### **(a) Annual Lettings Review**

(Minute No. 29(b) refers).

A member commented she had not yet received information on the Annual Lettings Review. T Healy indicated that he had thought that Strategic Housing would have cascaded this information to councillors but he undertook to follow up the matter and ensure a copy was sent to the member.

## **3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND 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 provided information on performance targets reported to this Area Board. The following comments were made:-

### **(a) Reporting on Rent Arrears Targets**

It was explained that the reference to no longer reporting on “average rent arrears per tenant” and “the number of tenants owing over seven weeks rent” was reference to a change in the KPI’s YHN was required to keep by the government. There would still, however, be local KPI’s. Members agreed that when there was still an issue in relation to rent arrears the Area Board should be kept informed.

### **(b) Satisfaction with Repairs and Maintenance Service**

T Healy explained that a meeting was being held locally to drive forward the aim of being above the city average of 94%.

### **(c) Satisfaction with Investment Programme**

H Sammut- Smith reported that the East End Performance had improved since the last meeting. She explained that improving satisfaction with the investment programme was a key priority for the department. A department internal meeting had been held to look at why the satisfaction levels had dropped with a report to the next meeting of Property Committee on this. H Sammut Smith undertook to send information regarding Daisy Hill to D Besag.

### **(d) Programmed Investment Packages Delivered**

It was noted that this indicator was green and exceeding targets.

(e) **The Number of Homes Made Decent**

Performance against target was green and the targets had been exceeded in the East End and across the city.

(f) **Voids Re-let Time**

It was noted that the voids re-let time was down to 28.5 days this week. The East End performance was in the green with some offices , such as Walker, achieving under 20 days.

(g) **Number of Void Properties available to Let**

The number of voids had dropped again. However, there was a need for empty properties to meet the demands being faced. A report was being submitted to Board in November for discussion on the issue of the high levels of demand for properties and the limited supply and how this matter could best be dealt with.

(h) **Reduction in Rent Arrears**

It was noted that there had been detailed scrutiny analysis of the work of staff in the East End in relation to rent arrears. This had helped to identify some weaknesses. An action plan had been developed for every officer which had included self-appraisal. As a result a direct training package had been put in place for each member of staff.

It was reported that there had been a further reduction with arrears now standing at £1,067,000 and it was anticipated this downward trend would continue.

It was commented that it would be important to assess the impact of the three free weeks on levels of rent arrears.

(i) **Percentage of Cases referred to in its HASBET**

It was noted that an analysis was being undertaken on the impact of HASBET and customer satisfaction levels.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received and the actions being taken to improve performance be approved.

4. **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 Young People's Services and Modern Homes.

(a) **Young People's Services**

It was explained that the indicator which was amber relating to the accreditation service was amber because of a timing issue with a change in accreditation body from the Open College Network to the Northern Council for Further Education. It was hoped that this indicator would revert to green once this issue had been addressed.

(b) **Modern Homes**

H Sammut - Smith explained the aim was for 90% satisfaction rate. Currently both the Citywide rate and in the East End only 85% was being achieved, which was disappointing. She referred to page 45 of the agenda which provided details of customer satisfaction for August/September 08/09. This showed that three schemes in particular had brought down the satisfaction rates:-

(i) **Adderstone/Grafton**

Feedback from tenants indicated that this had been a very disruptive scheme. In addition it had been one of Morrison's final schemes and tenants had felt that the staff were de-motivated. There had also been issues with an electrical sub-contractor on the scheme.

(ii) **Stotts Road**

This had had a result of 75% satisfaction, this was only a small scheme and the rate was based on only four responses. As a result consideration was being given to how it would be best to obtain a truer picture of satisfaction levels on the smaller schemes.

(iii) **Westbourne Avenue**

There had been a number of issues with this scheme. It had been an internal scheme that had taken place shortly after the external scheme. It was a FHM scheme and following the doubling in their allocation of work they had had to rapidly increase their staff numbers. FHM were aware of the problems that this created and had provided YHN with details of training they were putting in place to overcome these issues.

In addition, interim surveys were carried out by YHN whilst the contractors were on site. The contractors carried out 100% post work surveys.

In response to a members suggestion that YHN and contractors join resources to undertake customer satisfaction work, it was explained that tenants sometimes felt

they could be more open with YHN than they may be with the contractors.

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

## **5 MODERN HOMES STANDARD INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2008/09**

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

H Sammut Smith introduced the report which set out progress on the Modern Homes programme to October 2008; the key achievements of the Modern Homes programme between September and October 2008 and provided an update of the key issues affecting the delivery of the Modern Homes programme.

In relation to the Byker estate she had met with English Heritage earlier in the week to look at the pilot property with timber windows. Both YHN and the tenant were very happy with the pilot windows. A response was awaited from English Heritage.

It was noted that the Byker Heritage Protection Agreement should be in place by the end of the financial year. Regular meetings were held with YHN, Newcastle City Council and English Heritage in relation to the Byker listing.

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

## **6 REVIEW OF AREA BOARDS**

Submitted: Report by Head of Housing Management (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

T Healy introduced the report outlining the background to the review of the Area Board. The Area Board members then participated in a 20 minute SWOT analysis group exercise to capture their views on the issues relating to the current arrangements and to identify potential improvements for the future. T Healy took a record of all the strengths weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified and these would be fed into the review process.

Any member with any further comments was requested to submit them to T Healey.

**RESOLVED** – That:

- (i) the report be received;
- (ii) T Healy feed the information from the SWOT analysis into the review of Area Boards.

## 7 RABY STREET

Submitted: Report by Simon Dunlop (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

S Dunlop introduced the report which informed the Board of the current position with regard to the south end of Raby Street and the action that was being taken to resolve anti social behaviour and the letting of properties. This had resulted from a request at the previous meeting for more information on the position at Raby Street. The following key points were raised in debate:-

- There was a balance to be achieved between supporting vulnerable tenants. whilst at the same time ensuring that those creating the problems were aware that action would be taken against them and also being aware of the needs of other tenants in the area.
- It was felt that the good work in the area had paid off already and there was a need for more work to further improve the situation.
- Consideration was being given to increasing the size of the units in Avondale House to make them more attractive, options for funding were being explored.
- Members indicated that they had found the report and discussion very helpful in developing their understanding of the issues relating to Raby Street.

Members requested that a report along the lines of the report they had received on Raby Street be submitted to a future meeting on the situation at Walker Riverside.

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

## 8 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on the 8 January 2009. The Committee agreed that this meeting should be put back, T Healy to look into alternative dates for the meeting.

## Property Committee

17 November 2008  
(5.00 pm – 6.25 pm)

### Present:

G Allison (Chair)

### Also Present:

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

### In Attendance:

S Breslin	- Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Business, YHN
J Vinton	- Investment Delivery Manager, YHN
N Scott	- Director of Tenancy Services, YHN
A Gibson	- Assets and Programming, YHN
S Darroch	- Democratic Services, Newcastle City Council
J Hussain	- Strategic Housing, Newcastle City Council

## 1 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2008

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2008 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### Matters Arising:-

#### (a) Annual Gas Servicing 2008/09

(Minute n.o. 68 refers).

N Scott noted that at the last meeting he had undertaken to write to Committee members to clarify the financial and programme implications arising from the change to a 46 week gas servicing schedule. He apologised for not having sent out the information prior to the meeting and tabled a note setting out the basis of the change.

N Scott explained that the note detailed, for each financial year, a breakdown of the number of properties that would be serviced in successive programmes, together with the associated costs. For the purpose of the note, it had been assumed that there would be no change in cost or number of properties. However, in reality, there would be changes due to inflation and fluctuations in YHN housing stock, e.g. as a result of Right to Buy or demolition.

The committee was advised that the overall effect of the 46 week programme would be that a proportion of work from the next 46 week service cycle could be brought forward to commence during the last six weeks of the preceding financial year. This period would also provide an opportunity to capture any properties not able to be serviced in the relevant 46 week cycle, thereby helping to ensure that YHN met its legal obligation to carry out an annual gas service.

A Committee member commented that while he understood the basis for compressing the programme and how the costs were calculated, it must be recognised that under this system, some properties would be serviced twice in a twelve month period. Furthermore, he queried whether, if the servicing target was met in the 46 week cycle, there was still an operational need to bring forward the following year's programme, which was a cash flow benefit to City Build.

N Scott undertook to bring further data on the progress of the Gas Servicing programme to the January meeting to enable Property Committee to evaluate how the first 46 week cycle was progressing and to consider the need for any changes.

The Chair clarified that the extra cost being borne in each financial year was because work from the next servicing cycle was effectively being brought forward to ensure operational flexibility. N Scott acknowledged this and noted that if YHN failed to gain access and carry out an annual gas service, it would be liable in the event of an incident.

In response to a query from a Committee member, it was confirmed that fire alarms were generally checked as part of the Annual Gas Servicing programme. Where alarms were not mains fitted, batteries were expected to last ten years.

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

(Minute n.o. 70, 8<sup>th</sup> bullet, refers).

A Committee member referred to concerns raised at the last meeting about the extent to which YHN was confident that increases in repairs, following completion of modern homes schemes, was not attributable to poor quality work by constructors. He referred to problems with a particular property in the West End of the City. He acknowledged that it was not always clear if "poor quality" work was the cause of defects or whether having had significant work completed properties simply became de-stabilised.

The Chair noted that this issue would be considered further under Item 8 on the agenda, but evidence to date had not identified any clear pattern.

## 2 **REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE - CUSTOMER SATISFACTION REPORT QUARTER 2 2008/09**

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

N Scott presented the report which provided information on Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) customer satisfaction levels (including complaints), between July and September 2008. Property Committee was asked to consider the survey results.

Results were noted to be based on both a telephone survey of tenants who had had repairs carried out and responses received via returned customer satisfaction cards. The following key points were noted for the Committee's information:-

- 29,203 housing repairs had been undertaken during the period. 3,147 telephone interviews had been conducted (11% of completed repairs). Customer satisfaction cards had been sent to every tenant who reported a repair and during July – September 2008, 2,348 customer satisfaction cards had been returned (10% of repairs completed).
- Overall, satisfaction was very high with improvements in most areas, since the last quarter.
- During the three month period, 65 complaints had been received (0.2% of repairs carried out), of which, 38 had been upheld. The Committee was referred to Section 5.2 which identified the reasons for complaint.
- The target for customer satisfaction under the R&M contract was noted to be 92%, with actual performance running at 97%.

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

- (i) A committee member noted that she found the report clear and accessible. She acknowledged that YHN was undertaking a significant amount of work on how to engage with BME communities, but, referring to section 4.2, queried why a significant proportion of BME customers chose to give a 'neither' or 'not stated' response to whether they were satisfied with overall service.

N Scott noted that on a positive note, the percentage of BME customers responding to the survey, was higher than the population of BME tenants as a whole. However, he acknowledged that the proportion giving

“neither/or not stated” responses to the question of overall satisfaction was high and YHN needed to identify whether BME tenants were in any way concerned about giving a negative response. He also highlighted that the reason for differences between customer satisfaction survey results and complaint data in terms of BME responses, was that ethnicity information was not captured when a customer telephoned in with a complaint.

The Committee member acknowledged that work was under way in this area but queried whether YHN was confident that BME tenants were able to understand the survey forms. N Scott confirmed that the paper-based forms did have translation strap lines included but acknowledged that telephone surveys were sometimes more difficult where English was not the first language.

- (ii) A Committee member acknowledged that there was a balance to be struck between the level of survey carried out, resources used and the accuracy of the results obtained. However, he queried whether the 10% survey level achieved by YHN was reasonable.

N Scott confirmed that this level of response was considered to be statistically significant to enable accurate conclusions to be made. In addition, YHN encouraged responses through use of a prize draw.

The Chair confirmed that every tenant did have an opportunity to respond. The committee member acknowledged this point whilst noting that not all tenants may be confident about responding. YHN therefore needed to ensure, that as far as possible, the process was inclusive.

- (iii) In response to a query, it was confirmed that the inclusion of seven age categories on the telephone survey was fairly standard practice. A committee member commented that the survey results were very positive, but noted that in relation to Questions 5 and 8, no survey results were available. N Scott confirmed that this information was included in the graph on page 22.
- (iv) There was general agreement that presentation of Identification by trades people was a particularly important issue and it was an important point to reinforce with City Build.

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

### 3 **YHN INVESTMENT PROGRAMME – QUARTER 2 – CUSTOMER SATISFACTION OUTTURN**

Submitted: Report by Investment Delivery Manager and Customer Care Manager (previously circulated and a supplemental agenda and copy attached to Official Minutes).

J Vinton introduced the report which provided an update on customer satisfaction with the YHN Investment Programme for Quarter 2 2008/09 and also identified key actions taken as a result of tenant feedback.

The Committee was asked to note the information in the report and comment on its content. The following key results related to the Quarter 2 2008/09 Customer Satisfaction Survey were then noted:-

- The target for customer satisfaction was 90% with actual satisfaction levels running at 85%.
- J Vinton acknowledged that the current level of performance was disappointing and referred Committee members to Appendix 1 which outlined key issues identified from the 46 scheme surveys. The Committee was advised that of these schemes, 28 related to internal work which tended to have lower satisfaction scores as a result of the potential for disruption for tenants. Furthermore, some results related to Acquired Properties which were old Tyneside flats where problems often occurred with plaster work during internal schemes.

J Vinton also noted that it was considered that the effect of last year's benchmarking exercise was still being felt as constructors who had lost allocations were ramping down staffing levels and those with increased allocations were recruiting and training new staff. This could be having an impact on the quality of service experienced by tenants.

- It was also noted that recent changes to YHN's Replacement Rules together with the allocation of up-front survey work to City Design, may be causing tenants to feel dissatisfied because they were not receiving the scope of work they had expected, rather than any specific dissatisfaction with actual work carried out.
- J Vinton reported that Frank Haslam Milan (FHM) had responded to issues raised with them relating to customer satisfaction and were responding by delivering their own "tool box" training with operatives.
- It was noted that a number of respondents had indicated "neither/nor" responses which YHN counted as a negative response. A committee member suggested that treating inconclusive responses as a negative return may be having an unduly harsh impact on YHN's performance levels.
- A replacement page of Section 5 "Complaints Statistics" was tabled and noted.
- The Committee was referred to Appendix 2 which outlined actions taken by YHN in response to issues raised by tenants during the quarter.

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

- (i) The Chair noted that at the last meeting of YHN Outer West Area Board, tenants had complained that they were unhappy because they were not to receive replacement windows. He noted that instances of this type of dissatisfaction, where YHN had acted properly in accordance with its agreed policies, should not necessarily result in a particular scheme being marked down in terms of how successfully it had been delivered.

The Chair suggested that YHN may need to break down information on customer satisfaction further, to ensure that tenant satisfaction data on specific issues was not distorted by more general grievances.

J Vinton noted that the survey did try to collect data on specific issues. However, the question relating to overall satisfaction with a scheme was a specific question. JV agreed to look at this.

- (ii) A Committee member noted it was important that constructors did not raise tenants' expectations in terms of what they may be entitled to.
- (iii) In response to a query, it was confirmed that a written complaint was classified as 'formal' and a telephone complaint as 'informal'. However, both categories were investigated in exactly the same way.

The Committee member welcomed the inclusion of tenant representatives in post project reviews. J Vinton noted that this approach had been carried out from the start of the Modern Homes programme and had been particularly useful where there were active tenant groups.

The Committee member queried whether any specific steps had been put in place to encourage constructors to target their recruitment on local labour markets, given the current economic climate. J Vinton undertook to investigate this and report back.

- (iv) A Committee member queried the level of regard given to customer satisfaction data when work was then allocated. It was explained that customer satisfaction formed an integral part of the constructors' quality benchmarking score which, in turn, affected the extent of work allocated. It was noted that benchmarking had due regard to both cost and quality issues.

The Chair asked J Vinton to provide information on the benchmarking process to new members of Property Committee.

J Vinton also explained that YHN undertook a quarterly performance review with each constructor. This had resulted in instances where work had been withheld within the year as a result of poor performance data

being obtained.

- (v) A Committee member queried the value of the “neither satisfied/nor dissatisfied” response and the Chair acknowledged that there may be merit in reviewing the questions. He asked J Vinton to consider this and report back to a future meeting. A Committee member then noted that when reviewing survey results, the proportion of respondents who were actually dissatisfied was relatively low and suggested that YHN should not therefore be unduly critical of its performance.

It was also noted that in some cases responses could be misleading in that tenants sometimes vented their frustration with the wider aspects of a scheme which, were not necessarily the fault of the constructor or relevant to the specific question under consideration.

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

#### 4 **REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE – JOINT PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE REPORT SEPTEMBER 2008**

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

N Scott presented the report which detailed the performance and current financial position of the YHN Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) Contract at September 2008. The Committee was invited to consider and comment on performance and the current financial position.

N Scott referred the Committee to the table of performance information, as at September 2008. Overall, the majority of indicators were noted to be on green status indicating that targets were being met. However a number of specific issues were noted for the Committee’s attention:-

- R&M KPI 13 - “percentage of jobs raised on emergency status” was noted to be exceeding target level which was giving cause for concern. Work was underway to investigate this and it was hoped that a report could be brought back to the next meeting.
- R&M KPI 15 - “complaints responded to within 10 days”. In three areas across the City this indicator was below target. It was noted that responsibility for complaint handling lay with both City Build and YHN and the drop in performance had been caused by two complaints out of a total of 20, failing to be dealt with by the deadline.
- R&M KPI 16 – “ratio of expenditure between planned/responsive maintenance”. This was noted to be running at 32%/62% citywide. It was hoped that through various initiatives being adopted across the City this would move to a 50/50 split in due course.

- R&M KPI 17 – “average days from final appointment to issue of warrant”, performance was below target. It was felt that YHN and City Build had previously been too accommodating in allowing successive appointments to be made by tenants. This was being addressed.

With regard to finance performance, the following key points were highlighted:-

- The half year position (including non-contract work, e.g. painting programme) was noted as set out in Section 4 of the report. Projected overspend to the end of the 2008/09 Financial Year was reported as follows:-
  - Responsive repairs – £70,000
  - Planned repairs - £5,000
  - Planned cyclical maintenance - £5,000

It was explained that further information on budget position would be provided under Item 8 on the agenda.

A Committee member queried the target for responding to complaints within 10 days. N Scott confirmed that holding letters were not normally sent and this target required a full response to be made within 10 working days. Where this was not possible, a tenant should be contacted to explain the position and the next steps to be taken. When the matter was resolved, the tenant should then be contacted to confirm the position.

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

## 5 **REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACT BUDGET UPDATE**

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

N Scott presented the report which identified projected overspend against the Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) budget to the end of 2008/09 based on outturn from the first six months to September 2008.

Property Committee was asked to note the position regarding the R&M budget, to consider the actions being taken to manage and control expenditure, and to agree to receive a further report at the next meeting.

The Committee was referred to Section 3 of the report which highlighted key issues and areas of specific increased expenditure. The following key points were noted for the Committee’s attention:-

- In relation to day to day repairs, expenditure was forecast to increase by approximately £800,000 on an overall budget of £6.5m. Specific areas of increased expenditure included plaster work, plumbing, joinery, roofing and electrical work together with increases in the amount of day works and the value of day works.
- The budget for the Rapid Response Service was projected to result in an overspend of £423,000. It was noted that the facility, introduced in 2006, provided a high quality, highly responsive service. However, the more complex programming required to carry out the work resulted in higher costs, with Rapid Response being 13% more expensive than other repair services.
- Overspend on voids repairs were forecast at £520,000. However, much of this work was capital based and should more appropriately be carried out through the Modern Homes Programme (MHP) rather than via the “one stop shop” repairs service. If this expenditure was capitalised, the voids budget would be under-spent.
- N Scott noted that previously, the Committee had queried the extent to which work undertaken as part of the MHP, subsequently impacted on the Repairs Service. A review had been carried out of a sample of 1,285 properties where internal packages had been carried out to assess the level and cost of repairs in the six months before and after MHP work had been completed.

Analysis had indicated that prior to internal packages being completed average repair costs had been £50 per repair based on a sample of 700 repairs. Post MHP work, the average cost had risen to £66 per repair, based on 1,000 repairs completed.

The Committee was informed that further analysis had subsequently been conducted over a two month period after the initial post Modern Homes completion period. This had shown a reduction in the average cost of work to below the level incurred prior to the MHP work being carried out. As, this had been a useful exercise it had been decided to conduct two further samples of 1,000 properties across other parts of the City. The summary of these results would be brought back to Property Committee at the January meeting.

It was noted that at this stage no firm conclusions could be drawn about the extent to which repairs occurring after completion of Modern Homes programme work were directly attributable to poor performance by constructors. It was noted that there were a range of other factors which, could be contributing to the apparent rise in repairs after completion of internal works. It was confirmed that if it could be demonstrated that constructors were responsible, a process did exist for reclaiming money. However, as yet, no constructors had been billed under this process.

- The Committee was referred to Section 5 of the report which set out the overall budget position. It was noted that the total budget for Repairs and Maintenance was £24m against which an overspend of £84,000 was projected, in the event that capitalisation of work on void properties was taken into account.
- The Committee was reminded that a joint City Design/YHN Officer Working Group had been established to address overspend on the Repairs Service. This had met fortnightly and a presentation had been made to YHN Management Team, at which proposed actions had been agreed. The actions were noted as set out in Appendix 2 of the report. The committee was advised that in future there would be an increase in the extent of prior authorisation required before certain specified actions could be carried out. An update report would be brought to the January Property Committee meeting to review the position. It was noted that day to day overspend was still occurring but within the 2008/09 budget this would be tempered by void capitalisation.

A number of points were then raised in discussion:-

- (i) The Chair commented that it was not clear why, when re-wiring work had been carried out, a high level of electrical repair work was still being carried out.
- (ii) A Committee member noted that it was helpful that YHN was able to offset void capitalisation against the R&M over spend. N Scott acknowledged this and noted that YHN Board had also previously agreed to establish an R&M Reserve Fund which would also be available to offset any overspend identified. This fund was also available to carry out agreed planned maintenance work.
- (iii) A Committee member asked whether there was a process in place for constructors to re-visit properties to carry out snagging work, or whether YHN had to actively identify snagging jobs and contact the constructor to ask them to correct these. S Breslin confirmed that there was a designated hand over period and work was underway to review how this should operate.

The Committee member suggested that there may be a need for a formal snagging visit by constructors. N Scott noted that some issues were covered by warranty but there was possibly a need to consider other areas.

- (iv) A Committee member noted that customer satisfaction data was positive but budget information demonstrated that this was being delivered at a cost. It was important that YHN satisfied itself that it had the correct balance between cost and customer service.

N Scott acknowledged this and confirmed that by the next meeting he hoped to be able to present further information on the Rapid Response Service to enable better evaluation of this facility and its impact on customer service.

N Scott also noted that in response to points raised by the Audit Commission, YHN would also be reviewing the number of categories of repairs services.

The Chair thanked N Scott for his report. He noted that the Repairs and Maintenance Service had made some significant improvements and was now offering a good service to tenants.

**RESOLVED – That**

- (i) the report be received; and
- (ii) a report be brought to the January meeting to review progress with actions implemented to address budget overspend and to consider options for the Rapid Response Service.

**6 NORTH EAST PROCUREMENT CONSORTIUM – PRIVATE TENDER**

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

A Gibson introduced the report which provided details on a proposed pilot scheme to explore the benefits of delivering work in conjunction with the North East Procurement (NEP) Consortium.

The following points were then noted for the Committee's information:-

- (i) Since the previous report to Board a material sourcing procurement exercise had been undertaken by NEP. This had indicated that YHN was achieving material prices from the Modern Homes constructors which were favourable with those achieved by NEP.
- (ii) The next stage was now to review labour costs through an appropriate framework via NEP. This was being progressed with implementation planned for April 2009.
- (iii) NEP proposed to carry out a mini competition amongst construction partners wishing to be involved in the pilot.
- (iv) Estate 426 in Kingston Park, comprising 50 properties, would be used for

the pilot of internal works.

- (v) The next steps as set out in Section 4 were noted. By April 2009 it was expected that the labour framework would also be available.

Property Committee was asked to confirm that it was happy to proceed with the pilot exercise and to agree to receive an update on progress in due course.

**RESOLVED – That:-**

- (i) the report be received; and
- (ii) Property Committee agree the process for involvement by YHN in the pilot of a labour framework via the North East Procurement Consortium; and
- (iii) an update report be brought to a future meeting of Property Committee on progress with the pilot.

**7 YHN INVESTMENT PROGRAMME – MULTIS WINDOW SPECIFICATION UPDATE**

A Gibson gave a verbal update on savings potentially achievable by using UPVC windows in multi-storey flats.

It was reported that as part of the bench marking exercise, constructors had been asked to price on this basis. The committee was advised that this would yield potential savings of up to £1200 - £1800 per property, resulting in an overall potential saving to the Modern Homes programme of between £1 - £1.5m. It was confirmed that planning permission was required before this could be implemented.

**RESOLVED –** That the report be received and Property Committee agree that installation of UPVC windows in multi storey blocks be progressed subject to planning consent.

**8 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

**RESOLVED –** That the next meeting of YHN Property Committee take place on Monday 19 January 2009 at 5.00 pm at YHN House, Benton Road, Newcastle upon Tyne.