



Board 8 December 2009

Items for Information

1. Introduction

The attached are for information:

- (i) Delegated Decisions 21 October 2009 – 24 November 2009
- (ii) Petitions Monitoring
- (iii) Minutes :
 - Audit Committee held on 23 July 2009
 - Finance Committee held on 17 September 2009
 - Performance Committee held on 29 September and 27 October 2009

2. Recommendation

Board is asked to receive these for information.

Contact Officer:

If you have any questions about this report that you would like clarifying before the meeting, you can contact Maureen Dickson, Company Administrator & Board Support Officer by telephone on 0191 278 8624 or email maureen.dickson@yhn.org.uk

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**Delegated Decisions – Schedule of non-confidential Delegated Decisions taken between
21 October 2009 and 24 November 2009**

No	Directorate/Delegated Officer	Authorised Date	Subject	Cost/Budget Provision	Ward
1.	Your Homes Newcastle Atkinson Ross - (YHN Head of Corporate Service)	10/22/2009	Rents Online - Some linked files in the Rents Online system are missing and this work is to rectify the issue	Cost - £2,600 (including expenses of £200) Code - 1YC04/D404	All Wards
2.	Your Homes Newcastle Atkinson Ross - (YHN Head of Corporate Service)	10/22/2009	Business Objects reports = Service charge invoice balances, NCS payments, Leaseholder & former tenant mobile contact details plus work around FTA payment & arrangement, unpooling workstream & linked arrears	Cost - £789.75 Code - 1YCTG/D404	All Wards
3.	Your Homes Newcastle Atkinson Ross - (YHN Head of Corporate Service)	10/22/2009	Carry out Ecological Work at Reedsouth Place, Newcastle for proposed new development works	Cost £3,230 Code 1YMA3/D404	All Wards
4.	Your Homes Newcastle Atkinson Ross - (YHN Head of Corporate Service)	10/28/2009	Approve the expenditure for the purchase of a quantity of ten Fellowes Intellishred C-220Ci Cross Cut Paper Shredders for YHN House headquarters	Cost - £3,490 Code - 1YCSA/D111	All Wards

5.	Your Homes Newcastle Atkinson Ross - (YHN Head of Corporate Service)	11/5/2009	Approve the expenditure for the installation of a Split System Inverter Heat Pump Air Conditioning wall mounted unit within the Pendower Meeting Room 2nd Floor YHN House	Cost £1,640 Code 1YCSA/B312	All Wards
6.	Your Homes Newcastle Atkinson Ross - (YHN Head of Corporate Service)	11/5/2009	The provision of a consultancy service to assess and verify that YHN has attained the Corporate Equality Plan target, to reach Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government	Cost £5,175 Code 1YCED/D404	All Wards
7.	Your Homes Newcastle Scott Neil - Head of Housing Management	11/5/2009	To agree the possible spend of £35,000 to cover the costs of one-off R&M to warden call equipment in properties with warden alarm systems in	Code 1HK01/B217 Cost £35,000 est	All Wards
8.	Your Homes Newcastle Scott Neil - Head of Housing Management	11/8/2009	Remove & resite partition walls to relocate City Design Managers Office to increase Concierge Service office accommodation within the ground floor	Cost - £3,260 Code - 1YCSA/B312	All Wards
9.	Your Homes Newcastle Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	11/9/2009	Newcastle Tenants Federation business plan consultation	Cost - £3,500 - £4,000 Code - 1YDA9/D404	All Wards
10.	Your Homes Newcastle Scott Neil - Head of Housing Management	11/17/2009	Evaluation of Family Intervention Project	Cost - £5,000 Code - 1YN05/D404	All Wards
11.	Your Homes Newcastle Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	11/20/2009	Block 5 Liddle Road, structural stabilisation	Funding of the total expenditure amounting to £18,734 will be met from the Liddle Road Reserve Allocation (Part)	Westgate
12.	Your Homes Newcastle Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	11/20/2009	Improving the Support and Care Service	Funding of the total expenditure amounting to £11,947.32 will be met from the Office Accommodation budget. The remaining £11,947.31 will be met from the NCC - Children's Social Care budget.	Benwell and Scotswood
13.	Your Homes Newcastle Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	11/20/2009	Naworth Drive insulated render system	The total cost of £557,524.97 will be met from the Housing Investment Programme.	Westerhope
14.	Your Homes Newcastle Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	11/20/2009	District & Group Heating ?Supply, Installation and Commissioning of Heat Meters - OAP Bungalows and St Anns Close.	The cost of £32,610 will be met from the Housing Investment Programme.	All Wards

15.	Your Homes Newcastle Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	11/20/2009	Community Care Alarms and Telecare Key-safe expenditure 2009/10	The costs of £32,000 will be met by the Housing Investment Programme.	All Wards
16.	Your Homes Newcastle Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	11/20/2009	Phase 4 Warden Call Up-grade programme	The cost of £85,271 will be met by the HIP	All Wards
17.	Your Homes Newcastle Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	11/23/2009	Community Care Alarms and Telecare Equipment Expansion 2009/10	The costs of £131,040 will be met by the HIP.	All Wards
18.	Your Homes Newcastle Scott Neil - Head of Housing Management	11/24/2009	Implementation of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software solution. IT/Telephony Workstream	Cost £15,000 Code 1YHCS/D404	All Wards



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Petitions Monitoring

Petitioners:	Residents of Wyndley House		
Received:	3 November 2009	Response:	17 November 2009
Issues:	This petition was from residents of Wyndley House to revert the automatic front door closing system to a manual closer.		
Response:	It has been explained to the petitioners that the automatic door closer system had been installed in June 2009 with a 20 second time delay function to allow tenants to enter/exit the building without the door closing prematurely. Unfortunately, due to misuse the door closer malfunctioned on a number of occasions and following consultation with the Housing Services Manager and the Tenants Association, City Build have been requested to remove the automatic closer and revert to a manual door closer. The petitioners have been informed that the new closer is due to be installed by 30 November 2009.		

Contact Officer:

If you have any questions about this report that you would like clarifying before the meeting, you can contact Maureen Dickson, Company Administrator & Board Support Officer by telephone on 0191 278 8624 or email maureen.dickson@yhn.org.uk

Audit Committee

23 July 2009

(5.00 pm – 5.45 pm)

Present:

J Cuthbertson (In the Chair)
G Knox
L Stephenson
J Common
J Dalinson

In Attendance:

R Atkinson - Director of Finance and Resources
L Forrest - Head of Finance
A Lister - Finance Manager – Financial Business Support
G Ellingham - IT Manager
S Wood - Interim Chief Internal Audit Officer, Newcastle City Council
N Rippon - [Strategic Housing](#)
C Mulley - Ernst and Young
J Miller - Democratic Services

33. **APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from P.J. Morrissey and R Harral.

34. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING**

RESOLVED – That J Cuthbertson be appointed Chair for the meeting.

35. **ACTION LIST REVIEW**

Submitted: Action List from the 21 April 2009 (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Officers updated as follows:-

(a) **Revised Audit Committee Action Plan**

Short workshop meeting to be arranged to allow chair to revisit action plan, looking at when and by whom the actions could be achieved – this action to be held over until the Chair returned.

(b) **Annual Assurance Statement – Delegated System Decision System**

It was reported that the Delegated Decision System had not yet been implemented. The system was on the IT roadmap and there were a number of options. Newcastle City Council (NCC) were not currently able to provide a timeframe for when their automated system would be available as a result of changes taking place via the Transformation Programme. It would take 3-4 months to build a system from scratch. The compromise would be that the current system could be used with some configuration work costing in the region of £5 -10,000. This would be able to be in place until the integrated framework was in place at NCC. It was explained that the risk was that a decision may be taken and not properly recorded. It was agreed that R Atkinson consider the options and put forward a proposal, Internal Audit to ensure that the necessary controls were in place, with a report back to the next meeting.

36. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

37 **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

Internal Audit Strategic Planning Annual Plan

Internal Audit Annual Report

43. **YHN FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2008/2009 AND AUDIT RESULTS**

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

C Mulley of Ernst and Young commented that overall there was a very clean opinion from the external auditor and there were no concerns left at the year end.

Members congratulated staff on the opinion.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

44. **AUDIT COMMITTEE WORKPLAN**

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

A Lister introduced the report which set out the proposed workplan for Audit Committee to the end of the financial year; he explained that there were no dates beyond November as these would need to be considered once the new committee structure was in place following the AGM in September.

It was noted that there was one day's consultancy remaining with G Clark, Audit Commission. A decision on how best to use that could be made once the new committee structure was in place.

RESOLVED – That the proposed workplan be approved.

45. **JOHN CUTHBERTSON**

J Cuthbertson reported that this was his final meeting of the Audit Committee as he was standing down from the YHN Board at the AGM in September. He thanked officers and members for all their support during his time on YHN.

Finance Committee

17 September 2009

(3.00 pm – 4.20 pm)

Present:

R Harral (In the Chair)

W Bowman

J Cuthbertson

M O'Callaghan

A Mirza

In Attendance:

R Atkinson - Director of Finance and Resources

A Lister - Finance Manager – Financial Business Support

K Embleton - Finance Manager –Revenue

L Forrest - Head of Finance

N Scott - Director of Tenancy Services

A Crute - Income Manager

C Nicholson - Finance Manager – Procurement and Payments

G Ellingham - Head of IT (for part of meeting)

N Rippon - Monitoring Officer

G Haggerston - Democratic Services

96. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from D Slesenger.

The Chair thanked A Mirza for chairing the recent meetings. He also indicated that this was John Cuthbertson's last meeting and placed on record thanks for his contribution to the work of the Committee.

97. 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.

98. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matter Arising:-

(a) **Communications SLA Review**

(Minute No. C/87 refers)

It was noted that options were still being considered and the situation was being managed in the interim.

99. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2009 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matter Arising:-

(a) **Minutes**

(Minute No. 87 refers)

It was noted that the proposed format for this meeting had not been preceded with as it was considered pertinent to wait until after the AGM given that there would be new members on the Committee.

100. **ACTION LIST REVIEW**

Submitted: Action List (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Responsive Repairs System - the number of repair categories had been rationalised from eight to four. This revised set of categories had been introduced from the beginning of July 2009. It was proposed that this issue be picked up by the Customer Service Delivery Committee once it was established. As this matter would no longer come to Finance Committee, there would be no duplication. The Chair indicated that he was happy with this.

Concierge Service Review Interim Report – there was to be a presentation to the next Board meeting on this item.

Major Works – it was reported that the balance outstanding for major works was £24,000 and the target date was 2 October 2009. Staffing changes in IT had led to some delays, but recruitment was currently underway. Once the IT path was complete, the officer would have transferable skills and be able to make changes to it.

Arrears Monitor – it was noted that arrears would be the responsibility of the new Performance Committee, although there may be some overlap with this Committee.

101. **RENT ARREARS UPDATE**

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

It was noted that officers were encouraged the level of increase and rate of increase had stabilised in the last few months.

The Housing Benefit Service had seen an increased number of new claims being made, which were taking about 21 days to turn around. A number of actions had been taken to minimise the level of arrears and it was hoped the target arrears would be met.

A member queried whether an attachment of earnings could be imposed on tenants who were in arrears but was advised that it was not possible to obtain this without a court order. It was noted that YHN promoted direct debit/standing orders and while these payments were awaited, spikes were often seen in the level of arrears.

It was noted that the third non-collecting week had been very successful and would be continued in future.

It was reported that the rent collection rate placed YHN in the top 25% of ALMOs.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and the actions taken to support tenants and to reduce levels of rent arrears be noted.

102. **IT STRATEGY UPDATE**

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

The Committee were advised that a formal text based document would be submitted to a meeting of the new Finance and Resources Committee.

In response to a question from the Chair, G Ellingham commented that staff turnover within the Council had led to difficulty engaging in a strategic discussion at present. Service delivery was currently static and the Council was currently recruiting for a Head of IT. It was stressed that the service YHN were currently receiving was good and was not stopping YHN from delivering. However, it should be noted as a risk.

The Chair indicated that there was a need for a robust SLA to enable YHN to move forward and suggested that YHN officers draft an SLA for discussion with the Committee.

The Chair commented that in any strategy, there should be a process to ensure funding was available each year during the programme for it. It was noted that the bulk of the investment had been approved by the Management Team in May 2009 and some of the items were being brought forward from next year. He indicated that when the IT strategy came forward, it should be fully costed. The Chair commented that there was a need to discuss how the process would feed back into the Committee and suggested that timescales be included so that the Committee could be advised when parts of the project were to be completed by.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the report be received
- (ii) officers produce a draft SLA for discussion at Committee regarding IT infrastructure provision between the City Council and YHN

103. **YHN AND HRA REVISED REVENUE BUDGETS AND EFFECT ON THE MEDIUM TERM PLAN TO 2013/14**

Submitted: Report by the Finance Manager – Revenue (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

K Embleton reported that the YHN Management Fee had increased by £973,910, (which included a £2m provision for single status phase 2, although these results were not yet known) and the HRA is now estimated to have a surplus of £1,969,810cr, an increase of £584,780cr.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the amended YHN 2009/10 revised budgets and 2010/11 base budgets as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be approved;
- (ii) the amended HRA 2009/10 revised budgets and 2010/11 base budgets as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report be approved;
- (iii) the YHN/HRA medium term plan position up to 2013/14 as set out in Appendix 3 to the report be noted;
- (iv) the latest summary of Procurement Efficiency Savings as set

out in Appendix 3a to the report be received for information.

104. **CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME MOVEMENTS**

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

It was noted that the movements totalled slightly over £3m. The current investment programme forecast expenditure exceeded resources by over £9m and work needed to be undertaken on this.

RESOLVED – That the movements in the investment programme be approved.

105. **CORPORATE PROCUREMENT STRATEGY ACTION PLAN PROGRESS REPORT**

Submitted: Report by the Finance Manager - Procurement and Payments (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

It was noted that all actions were on target.

The Chair suggested that as well as the column showing the due date in Appendix 1, there should perhaps be a further column showing the estimated completion date.

A request was made that either the colouring of the printing or the type of paper used in Appendix 1 be altered as it was difficult to read.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the report be received
- (ii) consideration be given to adding a further column into Appendix 1 showing the estimated completion date
- (iii) consideration be given to altering the colour or shade of the printing or the type of paper used in Appendix 1.

106. **YHN PAINTING PROGRAMME 2010-2014**

Submitted: Report by the Finance Manager - Procurement and Payment Team (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

It was noted that the current arrangements ended in March 2010 and officers wished to extend the contracts by three months to the end of June 2010.

In response to a question from the Chair, it was noted that four years was the maximum timescale that could be entered into.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) approval be given to the extension of the current contracts for a period of three months to expire on 30 June 2010;
- (ii) approval be given to the re-procurement of the Painting Programme through the OJEU process, appointing two contractors on the basis of a cost/quality evaluation to cover the works required for the period 2010-2014.

107. A discussion took place around the transfer to the new Finance and Resources Committee and the sharing of good practice, the mechanisms for meetings, training etc. It was suggested that prior to the first meeting of the new Committee, members meet to discuss the way forward, possibly with an external facilitator and short training sessions.

Performance Committee

29 September 2009

(5.00 pm – 6.50 pm)

Present:

J Common - (Chair), J McLaughlin, M McMahon, N Shukla and L Stephenson

In Attendance:

N Scott	Director of Tenancy Services
K McDonald	Lead Officer, Performance Management and Policy
D Langhorne	Assets and Programming Manager
J Vinton	Investment Delivery Manager
J Collard	Performance Management and Policy Officer
I Gallagher	Head of Property Maintenance
W Keilty	Head of Customer Service and Improvement
L H Gray	Project Manager, Customer Services
S Armstrong	Democratic Services, Newcastle City Council

1. INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the Performance Committee indicating that the Committee terms of the reference were to support and deliver Your Homes Newcastle's mission by monitoring and driving performance.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Lynch and from S Breslin.

3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

RESOLVED – That N Shukla be appointed Vice Chair of the Performance Committee.

4. TRAINING FOR COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Members emphasised the importance of appropriate training to enable them to appreciate and understand their role. The following issues were highlighted:-

- Members came from a variety of backgrounds/organisations and would therefore have different training needs. In some instances a one to one session may be suitable.

- Training should be relevant and promote understanding of the scrutiny role as well as addressing the relationship of areas of activity to the organisation as a whole. (It was noted that Board Members had attended wider training appropriate to their role on the Board).
- Members had other commitments and it was essential to ensure a balance. Attendance at training should not be mandatory.
- Training needed to address the differences between performance targets (ie mandatory/in house).
- Presentation and format of information submitted to the Committee needed further consideration. Information should be both relevant and essential and submitted in a format that all Committee members could understand.
- Proper training should ensure that all members were able to undertake an active role in Committee meetings.

RESOLVED – That a simple training needs analysis form be forwarded to members of the Performance Committee to enable skills gaps to be identified and training sessions to be arranged accordingly.

5. **FORWARD PLAN/WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10**

The proposed work programme for 2009/10 was circulated at the meeting (copy attached to official minutes).

The Chair emphasised the importance of a Forward Plan that incorporated issues previously considered by the former committee regime that fell within the terms of reference for the Performance Committee. The intention was to alternate business meetings with a themed meeting to enable detailed consideration to be given to particular issues.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the work programme/forward plan for 2009/10 be approved, subject to the identification of any key areas that required regular reporting and the introduction of a mechanism for exceptional reporting on critical business issues;
- (ii) any further comments on the proposed work programme be submitted direct to the Lead Officer within the next two weeks.

6. **PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT - QUARTER ONE**

Submitted: Report by the Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Business indicating performance against the top 20 targets for 2009/10 and two national indicators set by the Government. The report outlined current performance against targets and performance trends including any collective action for improvement (copy attached to Official Minutes).

The following issues were highlighted:-

- (i) Concerns were raised at an apparent downward trend in reduction of rent arrears. N Scott indicated that historically there was usually an increase in rent arrears at the beginning of the financial year that stabilised by the year end. The figures were expected to be on target. It was noted that the Finance Committee had considered this issue and that duplication of scrutiny needed to be avoided.
- (ii) The reference to construction partners in the targets for homes to be made decent 2009/10 related to unavoidable delays from the appointment of new construction partners due to time required for recruitment at the beginning of the financial year. The target was expected to be met by the year end.
- (iii) Sickness targets required further clarification to enable scrutiny on a service by service business. A projected outturn needed to be identified. Reality checking was an essential part of this process. Predictive graphs/information from previous years would assist the scrutiny process.
- (iv) While members welcomed the 'traffic light' reporting format, further information was required on indicators highlighted in blue without supporting data. N Scott confirmed that this situation was being addressed and information should be available for the next business meeting.
- (v) A member queried the time period for handing in keys following formal notice from a tenant and referred to a particular incident. N Scott undertook to discuss this outside of the meeting.
- (vi) New targets such as that for Investors in the People, required supporting background information. In this case, while it was recognised that the target was based on ensuring the action plan was implemented on time, the impact and value added element needed to be demonstrated. N Scott reported that information on the staff survey outcome would be submitted to the next business meeting.
- (vii) In response to a query, N Scott confirmed that an update on equalities issues would be considered at the next Management Team meeting. A report was scheduled for the December 2009 Board meeting. Equalities monitoring was a responsibility of the Board, but this Committee would have an opportunity to comment on the scrutiny aspects. Members emphasised the importance of ensuring a proper monitoring process.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the Performance Monitoring report for quarter one be received and the comments from the Performance Committee noted and acted upon;
- (ii) in future, the report include where possible, a column indicating the projected year end position to enable this to be used as an indicator.
- (iii) the equalities framework be discussed at a future meeting.

7. SERVICE STANDARD PERFORMANCE - QUARTER ONE

Submitted: Service Standard Performance Monitoring report for Newcastle Furniture Service, Sheltered Housing Service, Community Care Alarm Service and Right to Buy (copy attached to Official Minutes).

N Scott reported that the Service Standard monitoring report was presented in a similar format to the Area Board reporting system whereby service standards were reported on the rotational basis outlined in the report. Standards were currently being reviewed in consultation with residents and some would be changed.

The following issues were highlighted:-

- (i) As previously indicated, further information was required on those indicators shown in blue to enable valid consideration. N Scott indicated that data collection processes were being reviewed to address this.
- (ii) It was essential that regular information was submitted on those targets not being achieved to enable this to be addressed quickly.
- (iii) Additional relevant information/explanation of terms (eg the total number of empty sheltered housing properties, clarification of a 'notice of delay' on Right to Buy etc). was required to promote understanding.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the Service Standards Performance report for quarter one be received and the comments of the Committee noted and acted upon;
- (ii) where significant changes/issues of concern were identified, these be submitted to of the Performance Committee under the exceptional reporting mechanism referred to in Minute 5.

8. **COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE - QUARTER ONE**

Submitted: Report by the Head of Customer Service and Improvement summarising informal, formal, escalated and ombudsmen complaints received for the first quarter of 2009/10, including information on improvements undertaken, claims for and levels of compensation, satisfaction levels, demographic information and value for money (copy attached to Official Minutes).

W Keilty reported that the key performance targets for quarter one had been exceeded. Complaints training was now being tailored to services. It was noted that an apparent initial increase in informal complaints had arisen from a fall in the previous year. There were also some differences in reporting mechanisms across the three areas.

The Committee welcomed the comprehensive nature of the report indicating that this subject needed to be examined in more detail. In future, the report format may need to be simplified and more concise. This could be discussed at the first themed meeting.

Data collection needed to be revisited to ensure that significant issues such as under representation or over representation could be identified and that the data was meaningful. Data on sexuality should also be included to promote inclusiveness. Data collection information needed to be reviewed to ensure that tenants understood the relevance.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the Compliments and Complaints Performance report for quarter one be received and the comments of the Committee noted and acted upon; and
- (ii) Compliments Comments and Complaints be the subject of the first themed meeting on 27 October 2009, the meeting to include a brief introduction on the complaints process followed by a detailed scrutiny of all the information available.

9. **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

The following reports (previously considered by the former Property Committee) were submitted for information (copies attached to official minutes). The content would form the basis of scrutiny at future meetings :-

- (i) Repairs and Maintenance Performance Quarter One;
- (ii) Repairs and Maintenance Customer Satisfaction Quarter One;
- (iii) Investment Programme Quarter One;
- (iv) Investment Programme Customer Satisfaction Quarter One.

Concerns were expressed at the complex nature of these reports and that Committee members needed background information to promote understanding of these issues. Abbreviations should be written out in full to enable members to become familiar with the terms expressed.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the reports be noted;
- (ii) the reports be considered at future themed meetings, the Repairs and Maintenance Performance and Customer Satisfaction reports to be considered together at one meeting and the Investment Programme Performance and Customer Satisfaction reports to be considered together at another themed meeting. (Each meeting to include a brief introduction to promote understanding);

10. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The themed meeting be held at 5.00 pm on 27 October 2009, to consider Compliments Comments and Complaints performance.

Performance Committee

27 October 2009

5.00 pm – 6.50 pm

Present:

J Common - (Chair), V Dunn, R Higgins, M Lynch, N Shukla and J McLaughlin

In Attendance:

J Lee	Chief Executive
C Collard	Performance Management and Policy Officer
K McDonald	Lead Performance Management and Policy Officer
W Keilty	Head of Customer Service and Improvement
L H Gray	Project Manager, Customer Services
J Edminson	Democratic Services, Newcastle City Council

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from L Stephenson and S Breslin.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 SEPTEMBER 2009

The minutes of the meeting were confirmed as a correct record save for

- the addition of V Dunn to list of apologies and

- an amendment on page 3, item 6, line 2, which should read '21' targets and not '20' as stated.

3 MATTERS ARISING

The Chair informed the Committee that progressing the training needs analysis for members of the Performance Committee was in hand.

4 THEMED SESSION – COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

A paper was circulated 'Compliments and Complaints Training and Report' Review (copy attached to the Official Minutes), and W Keilty introduced this session which would cover the following:-

- Aims and objectives

- Awareness/overview of compliments and complaints process
- SWOT analysis
- Future reports and activity for members to come up with suggestions
- Knowledge quiz

The session was essentially being aimed at raising the awareness and understanding of members of the compliments and complaints process and policies, and to determine areas for improvement.

A SWOT analysis had already been completed in advance by YHN officers and could be added to at any time. The main activity concerned looking at alternative ways other organisations handled this subject. Some had detailed/complex procedures and data presentation methods whilst others were fairly simplistic, and the Committee would be asked to comment on how they would like to see the structure of reports presented in the future.

YHN welcomed complaints and did not take a negative approach to them. Complaints were an opportunity to determine how to improve services and learn from the feedback.

L Gray presented the overview. YHN had a package of 'Compliments and Complaints' leaflets which were widely available (examples were circulated at the meeting – attached to Official Minutes).

When positive feedback was received from customers when things were going well, front line officers forwarded it to the Customer Services Team where it was logged and given a unique reference number. The customer would then be sent a 'Thank You' letter and the information would be fed into the Champions Group.

Feedback from complaints was welcomed. Anyone who had used or was about to use YHN services could make a complaint about any service that YHN had not got right – a somewhat wide remit.

There were three steps in the stages of complaints and a final further step:-

- Step One – Informal Complaints. These were usually quick and easy to deal with for which front line staff had the resolve and skills to answer.
- Step Two – Formal Complaints. For the more 'complex' complaint which a Manager would investigate.
- Step Three – Escalated Complaints. Only applied after investigation at Step Two before being investigated independently at Step Three by Newcastle

City Council.

- The Final Step – the Local Government Ombudsman.

The paper circulated contained more in-depth information on each of the steps.

Informal complaints were very valuable and front line staff would help any member of the public lodge a complaint.

If the complainant did not feel the complaint was satisfactorily resolved at the informal stage, a more in-depth formal process was available, and details were recorded on a data base.

All managers had a target of 10 working days to respond, but if unable to respond in that time could send out a holding letter informing the complainant when they could expect a reply. If a complaint affected more than one service area, steps were taken to identify one officer to take control of co-ordinating all elements of the complaint.

Where a complaint was justified, YHN could look to a remedy or make compensation on some occasions, eg flowers. A month later a satisfaction note was sent out asking the customer how the complaint process went.

Staff received informal complaints training using case studies in order to identify the differences between informal and formal complaints, as well as training on typical characteristics of a complaint.

The benefit of additional demographic information provided a more detailed knowledge of customers and gave a steer on types of groups, particularly community groups and the range of areas from which complaints emanated.

Following a discussion on the formal complaints procedure the following matters were highlighted:-

- Very specific guidelines applied within the Remedies Policy – the aim was to put things right and apologise.
- The returns from the Satisfaction Form were originally low at about 15% but this had crept up to 40% by follow-up telephone calls.
- Complaints were about empowerment and some people did not have a great deal of confidence in making a complaint.
- An instance was cited when a resident in a local ward had a complaint upheld but there had been no mention of compensation being considered.
- Would there be benefit in holding a straw poll of complainants about whether

they were happy with the first stage or perhaps defensive about going to the second stage?

- The Chair said it would be useful for the Committee to have sight of the Remedies Policy and what sort of training the staff had in carrying out the policy.
- Members of staff were expected to report to a manager any confrontation with a local resident so it could be logged accordingly and if a complaint against a member of staff was eventually made, the correlation would be immediately transparent.
- There were some concerns about developing a compensation culture and it was vital to distinguish when a complaint was about a third party contractor and not YHN.

Escalated complaints were investigated by City Council Corporate Complaints which introduced an element of independence. YHN officers co-operated with that investigation. There was a 15 day target to respond to the complaint, and generally this target was met with the odd exception. Some 82% of complaints were dealt with at the Stage 1 informal stage, and 16% at the formal stage. About 1% were escalated and much less than that went to the Ombudsman.

YHN could help a complainant through the Ombudsman process. There were two cases known to be open at the moment with 3 or 4 at most, at any one time.

The training papers also include a section on the Review of Complaints.

A group of officers across the organisation had an additional duty of being a Complaints Champion, and all complaints were reviewed on a quarterly basis, looking at trends, historical data and bigger issues.

There was a Scrutiny Panel made up of up to ten tenants and leaseholders, who received all Step 3 complaints on a quarterly basis. The Chair said she had sat in on one of their meetings and could confirm the openness of the process.

L H Gray undertook to send an invitation to all Performance Committee members to have the same experience, and a list of dates would be circulated.

If someone made a series of 'unreasonable and persistent' complaints, these were recorded and if it was the same issue reported over and over again the Panel would decide what action to take to stop this happening.

A further discussion ensued which elicited the following information:-

- It was recognised some time ago that young persons were not complaining, so in order to raise awareness, posters were produced to promote this activity, so young people could understand the complaints process and how

to access it.

- The original Scrutiny Panel was set up some 18 months ago with the Tenants' Involvement Team, and leaseholder involvement was encouraged. Letters were sent to a wide range of people asking them to express an interest. It was a panel of mixed gender, with little youth or ethnic involvement. The composition remained unchanged and it would be reviewed in due course.
- Different databases were used for tracking/recording complaints which was an obvious weakness.

Copies of the Remedies Policy and 'Talk to Us' leaflets were circulated at the meeting.

The final element of the report concerned the SWOT analysis, and to assist discussions a number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats had been identified as follows:-

- **Strengths**

Value for money

Easy to access

Learning from our customers

Best practice in industry

Open reports to Committee

- **Weaknesses**

Complicated reports to Committee

Difficult to scrutinise

Two different IT systems

- **Opportunities**

Learning from our customers

New complaints IT system

- **Threats**

New complaints IT system

The Chair pointed out that some strengths could also be perceived as a weakness, eg transparency in system of being easy to access was recognised but certain elements of the customer base were not accessing it. This would be added to the Weakness Statement.

The complex reports to the Committee were very labour intensive to produce which begged the question whether we should continue along these lines or consider a better/different alternative reporting system?

There were two different IT systems and there was no simple solution to enable them to be harmonised. Might need a completely different solution in time.

As for opportunities, the existence and role of the Performance Committee should be added.

The Chair invited comments on the SWOT analysis and the following points were made:-

- (i) Wider representation on Scrutiny Panel was needed – add to weaknesses
- (ii) Data collection needed to be improved, especially ‘knowing your communities’ – add to Opportunities
- (iii) There was potential for a lot of duplication of work and processes should be continually appraised – add to Weaknesses
- (iv) Need to be aware of conflicting Agenda, eg improving access to complaints system leads to increase in number of complaints and might be interpreted as a worsening service – add to Threats
- (v) YHN was a learning organisation and looked to stakeholders for continual improvement.

The role of the Tenants’ Services Authority was it a Threat and/or Opportunity?

The Committee proceeded to examine a number of reports that other organisations used for reporting 'compliments and complaints' data. Three groups were established for this purpose and asked to feedback on their preferences.

At the conclusion of the group discussions, a first draft of a new format for reporting compliments and complaints was circulated (copy attached to Official Minutes). The current report took about one week to prepare and the new format would drastically reduce preparation time to above one and a half days.

The general view of the Committee was that the proposed new report was more user friendly.

The Chair observed that, in her experience, the Strategic Overview Statement would usually be at the beginning of a report.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the proposed new format for reporting compliments and complaints be agreed in principle, and piloted for the next meeting of the Performance Committee; and
- (ii) the proposal that the Strategic Overview Statement be set out at the beginning of the report be referred for discussion to the next Board meeting.

5 **ACTION LIST**

RESOLVED – That as proposed by the Chair YHN officers draw up a rolling list of actions following meetings of Performance Committee to be submitted to and updated at future meetings.

6 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting and reminded everyone that the next meeting would be a formal business meeting, to be held at 5.00 pm on 1 December 2009.

