



Board

22 September 2009

(5.25 – 6.45 pm)

Present: S Murphy (Chair), W Bowman, J Common, W Drury, V Dunn, R Harral, G Keating, J McLaughlin, M McMahon, M O’Callaghan, J Reid, R Renton, N Shukla, L Stephenson.

In Attendance:

J P Lee	- Chief Executive
R Atkinson	- Director of Finance and Resources
S Breslin	- Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Business
N Scott	- Director of Tenancy Services
D Creighton	- Executive Assistant to Chief Executive
M Dickson	- Company Administrator and Board Support Officer
A Hodgson	- Head of Housing Management
M Burn	- Head of Support and Care
B O’Doherty	- Head of Citywide Services
W Keilty	- Manager, Customer Service & Improvement
I Gallagher	- Head of Property Maintenance
L Forrest	- Head of Finance
G Ellingham	- Head of IT
H Garbutt	- Concierge Service Manager
S Doyle	- Diversity Manager
P Hickey	- Manager, Central Administration
L Dixon	- Lead Tenant Involvement Officer
H Nixon	- Tenant Involvement Officer
S Clarke	- Involvement & Diversionary Officer
D Sweetland	- Global MSC

Observers:

P Woods	- Newcastle City Council
H Emms	- Newcastle City Council
N Rippon	- Newcastle City Council

M Brady - Newcastle Tenants Federation
J Emmerson - Leazes Homes
C Tweedie - Leazes Homes
C Cothill - Newcastle Tenants Federation
J Coulson - Newcastle Tenants Federation
B Watson - Newcastle Tenants Federation
A Barrie - Newcastle Tenants Federation
N Stephenson - Newcastle Tenants Federation
M Lowson - Newcastle Tenants Federation
B Graham - Newcastle Tenants Federation
K Harrison - Newcastle Tenants Federation
J Cuthbertson - resident Riverside Dene
2 Members of Concierge staff
2 Members of the public

1 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. He welcomed Mary McMahon to her first Board meeting and R Harral and N Shukla who had been re-appointed to the Board.

2 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from M Lynch, A Mirza and D Slesenger.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

J McLaughlin declared an interest in agenda item 7 – Concierge Service Review.

4 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

Before the results of the ballot were announced, the Chair explained that three nominations for the two positions of Vice Chair had been received. It had been decided, following advice from the Legal Advisors, to hold a postal ballot for these positions and this had taken place during September.

R Atkinson announced that 18 ballot papers had been returned and a total of 34 votes counted. The results were:

Candidate	Votes cast
V Dunn	05
G Keating	14
M O'Callaghan	15

It was **RESOLVED** that G Keating and M O'Callaghan be elected Vice Chairs for the period to the next Annual General Meeting.

5 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

(a) Tenant Services Authority (Minute No 139 refers)

N Scott reported that following the last meeting a consultation session for Board Members had taken place and YHN's response had been forwarded to the TSA. (A copy of the response had been included in the board paper pack.)

He also asked Board to note that YHN's application to take part in a pilot scheme to establish national standards in relation to Tenant Choice and Customer Service had been successful.

(b) Fire in high rise in Camberwell (Minute No 147 refers)

J P Lee reported that Tyne and Wear Fire Authority was happy with the approach being taken by YHN; however the Authority had raised issues around the provision of door closers on individual flats and about communal lighting. It was intended to produce a detailed report for Board about the additional requirements and the financial implications for YHN.

(c) Ethnicity Monitoring and YHN Customer Profile (Minute No 142 refers)

A Board Member asked whether it was possible to investigate in greater detail the increase in the number of registrations received from BME communities. J P Lee replied that future ethnicity monitoring reports would provide more detail about the level of interest and the communities expressing interest. The report would also consider the barriers that prevented BME communities from expressing interest in YHN properties.

(d) Area Board Review (Minute No 141 refers)

A Board Member asked whether there was any further information available about the introduction of themed meetings to replace the area boards. N Scott

confirmed that feedback on the first round of themed meetings would be reported to Board before the end of the financial year.

6 CONCIERGE SERVICE REVIEW

Submitted: Report by Director of Tenancy Services (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) outlining the findings of the Concierge Service Review.

With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, N Scott explained the reasons why the review had taken place and how the review had been conducted. He highlighted the key issues and themes that had emerged from the technical review and from the consultation exercises. Three options had been consulted on. Option 2 was now being presented to the Board as the preferred option. In presenting the financial implications Board was asked to note that indirect costs associated with the Service would still have to be met from the HRA and that further reports would be presented to Board to consider the financial implications of the preferred option in more detail.

Questions/comments

- A Board Member asked whether there had been any investigations into why only 859 questionnaires had been returned. Feedback to the Board Member was that the questionnaire had been too complicated.

In response, N Scott said that YHN had sought to present the information in a way that was not too complicated and it was disappointing that some tenants had not understood the questionnaire. It was, however, a complex matter and therefore in addition to the questionnaire there had been opportunities for tenants to attend roadshows and other events. He confirmed that consultation would be ongoing and a communication plan put in place to make sure tenants were aware of the outcome of the review and the implementation programme.

- A Board Member commented on the wide ranging level of attendance at consultation events which showed that some tenants were more actively involved than others. He also commented that with an elderly stable population, there might be resistance to change.
- Another Board Member commented that he had received feedback that the questionnaire had been complicated and difficult to understand. He suggested that it was important to liaise with residents and project workers to link into other meetings/events which could aid the consultation process. He also noted that although councillors had been formally consulted there was no report on their feedback.

N Scott confirmed that city councillors had been consulted, including in those Wards where tenants received the concierge service. However, there had been little response.

- A Board Member commented on the way that the responses had been assimilated and was unsure how option 2 had been arrived at as the preferred option. The Board Member also expressed concerns about the proposed four year implementation plan, during which time it was likely that technology would move on. He was concerned that the service charge of £11.32 per week (compared to the costs for options 1 and 3) might mean that tenants would not have the same level of service as currently experienced.

In response, N Scott explained that the responses to options 2 and 3 had been assimilated as these options provided the same service with the exception that option 3 would provide two control rooms, as opposed to one control room in Option 2; options 1 and 2/3 provided quite different levels of service. Tenants had been asked to provide a view on the overall service to be provided. He also pointed out that by implementing option 2, the cost efficiencies would be released to fund capital investment.

D Sweetland (Technical Consultant) added that implementation would keep pace with technical developments and the system would be consistently monitored by the provider who would be required as part of the contract to keep the technology up to date.

- A Board Member asked whether risk assessments had been carried out in relation to the network system and the potential health and safety risks to staff in terms of changed patterns of work. The Board Member also asked whether the indirect costs reflected an increase cost to the HRA or whether there was no change. A further point related to SLAs with NCC. It had been noted that this cost was £1.3m and the Board Member asked whether this related only to the Building Cleaning SLA.

N Scott explained that the Building Cleaning SLA was one of a number of SLAs with NCC. The in house delivery of building cleaning had been discussed with NCC who raised no objection in principle for the service to be transferred to YHN as long as there was an assurance that NCC staff had protection through TUPE.

N Scott clarified that there would be a reduction of HRA subsidy – this would be a reduction of direct costs based on a reduction of staff costs for the current service compared with the staff costs under Option 2. Indirect costs would be unchanged. Generic health and safety assessments would be carried with additional assessments out on a site by site basis as needed.

D Sweetland explained that if the fibre network failed, the application would remain working and operatives could talk to tenants. It would be possible for help points to be switched over. Agreed response levels would be agreed with the provider and would be part of the Agreement.

- A Board Member asked that previous comments about the consultation questionnaire be taken into account when conducting future consultation/engagement exercises with tenants and leaseholders.

At this point in the meeting, the Chair asked whether Board Members thought there was a need for re-consultation in view of the issues raised about the consultation process. Board Members said there was no need to re-consult, but that future consultation should be kept as simple as possible.

- A Board Member commented that the service received by residents of Tynedale House was above that received by other users of the concierge service. He acknowledged the need for a consistent level of service and consistency amongst staff and asked how this would be achieved. The Board Member also asked what the gender balance was amongst concierge staff.

N Scott explained that in future, smaller groups of staff would work in blocks that were geographically close to each other; however the same member of staff would not work in a particular block each day. The preferred option for delivery of the service would provide consistency across the City. In terms of gender balance, the majority of concierge staff were male.

- The Board Member suggested that if possible it would be better to have more balanced recruitment.
- A Board Member expressed concerns about response times and also asked, in view of comments about the outdated nature of the current technology, why the present system had not been updated.

N Scott replied that the proposals would increase staff availability and reduce response times. He added that the current system had been inherited by YHN and although a replacement programme had been in place, the focus for YHN was to deliver the modern homes programme and the majority of funding had been allocated to this purpose.

The Chair brought the debate to a conclusion and asked Board Members to consider the recommendation to agree Option 2.

(R Renton was not in support of Option 2.)

RESOLVED – That

- (i) option 2 with centralised monitoring from one central control room on site with responsive staff be agreed;
- (ii) a further report on the funding associated with the implementation of option 2 be submitted to a future meeting of Board;

- (iii) further reports on service charges, implementation and communication plans be submitted to future meetings of Board.

The Chair thanked everyone involved in the Review for their contributions to this major piece of work.

7 YHN BUSINESS STRATEGY (2009-2014) - STEPPING UP: IMPROVING ON EXCELLENCE IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Submitted: Report by Chief Executive (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) introducing YHN's first Business Strategy to cover the period 2009 – 2019 which was in line with the current Management Agreement with NCC.

In introducing the report, J P Lee said that the title of the strategy demonstrated the intention to continue to improve across all of our activities, even though the organisation had been rated as an excellent service provider. Consultation had shown that the organisation's mission to be the best housing provider in the North East remained valid, as did its strategic objectives.

Questions/comments

- A Board Member asked that the document be checked for inconsistencies and queried the inclusion of the national policy context in Section 4.

J P Lee replied that it was considered appropriate to include this as it was the framework within which housing organisations were required to work. It had to be accepted that these frameworks would change depending on government thinking. Section 4 also contained extracts from NCC's Housing Strategy to reflect the local context.

- A Board Member commented on some of the terminology within the document, suggesting that if the document was intended for YHN's customers the document should be written in a more accessible style.

J P Lee replied that this was a strategic document and not necessarily aimed at customers, although an executive summary could be produced for that purpose.

RESOLVED – That the above comments be noted and the Strategy amended for final sign off by the Chair.

8 COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Submitted: Report by the Chair (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) proposing the Committee Chairs and Committee membership for the period to the next Annual General Meeting.

The Chair asked Board to note that there would be a review of the new committee structure in six months' time and during this time Committees would have the opportunity to consider whether their terms of reference needed any amendment. The Chair also invited Board to note that a remit protocol was being introduced to deal with matters that were not within committees' terms of reference and about which they had concerns.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the Committee membership, set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed;
- (ii) the following be appointed as Chairs of Committees for the period to the next Annual General Meeting:
 - Audit Committee: Bill Drury
 - Finance & Resources Committee: Roger Harral
 - Customer & Service Delivery Committee: Ammar Mirza
 - Performance Committee: Judith Common
- (iii) a review of the new committee structure be conducted by March 2010;
- (iv) the Remit Protocol be agreed;
- (v) the Scheme of Delegations be approved for consideration by Committees and any amendments be submitted to Board for approval.

9 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

RESOLVED – That the following items be received for information:

- Delegated Decisions 17 July to 11 September 2009
- Petitions Monitoring
- Minutes of Finance Committee held on 16 July 2009 and Governance & Personnel Committee held on 2 June and 4 August 2009.

10 CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

The confidential Minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2009 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

11 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

RESOLVED – That the following be received for information:

- Confidential Delegated Decisions 17 July to 11 September 2009
- Minutes of Finance Committee held on 16 July 2009.