



Board

28 July 2009

(5.00 – 6.50 pm)

Present: S Murphy (Chair), W Bowman, J Common, J Cuthbertson, V Dunn, G Knox, J McLaughlin, A Mirza, P J Morrissey, M O'Callaghan, J Reid, R Renton, L Stephenson.

In Attendance:

J P Lee	- Chief Executive
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
J Vinton	- Manager, Investment Delivery
S Doyle	- Diversity Manager
A Lister	- Finance Manager (Business Support)
K Embleton	- Finance Manager (Revenue)
S Gall	- Finance & Resources

Observers:

N Rippon	- Newcastle City Council
J Coulson	- Newcastle Tenants Federation
N Stephenson	- Newcastle Tenants Federation
M Thompson	- Newcastle Tenants Federation
M Lawson	- Newcastle Tenants Federation
A Barrie	- Newcastle Tenants Federation
M McMahon	- Tenant Board Member (designate)

136 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Mary McMahon to the meeting and M O'Callaghan, Vice Chair, briefly introduced her. Mary would be taking up the position of tenant board member at the Annual General Meeting on 22 September 2009.

The Chair announced that Your Choice Homes had been recommended for the Customer Service Excellence Award. This was excellent news and the Chair congratulated all those concerned in helping to achieve it. This latest achievement meant that YHN had eight services that had received a Customer Service Excellence award.

137 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from W Drury, R Harral, R Higgins, G Keating, N Shukla, and D Slesenger.

138 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

(a) Riverside Dene (Minute No 135 (c) refers)

The Chair reported that a response had been received from B Rowland and that YHN had subsequently contributed to the report on Riverside Dene that had been submitted to Newcastle City Council's Executive.

139 TENANT SERVICES AUTHORITY

Submitted: Report by Chief Executive (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) setting out the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) proposals for regulating social housing.

J P Lee summarised the consultation carried out so far by the TSA and outlined the proposed objectives for national standards and the approach for monitoring standards.

J P Lee said that Management Team would be preparing a technical response that would be shared with Board Members. However, Board might want to express a view on the options being put forward by the TSA relating to governance.

M Dickson explained that the Good Governance Standard for Public Services underpinned YHN's governance arrangements and the way in which the Standard's six core principles were applied was set out in a report tabled at the

meeting.

J P Lee suggested that it might be useful for Board to hold a dedicated session to consider their response to the consultation document. Alternatively board members could feed back their views individually.

J P Lee asked Board to consider whether YHN should apply to take part in a pilot scheme to establish national standards, explaining that YHN would submit an application under the category 'Tenant Choice and Customer Service'.

Question/comments

- Board Members supported the suggestion to hold a dedicated session on this matter.
- Some board members raised issues relating to private landlords and J P Lee explained that the TSA had not been set up to regulate the private sector, although as part of Board's feedback the TSA could be asked for their view on extending their remit to cover aspects of the private sector.

RESOLVED - That

- (i) a session be held in August for Board to consider their responses to the consultation.
- (ii) an application be submitted to take part in a pilot scheme to establish national standards in the category of Tenant Choice and Customer Service.

140 HOUSING STRATEGY REFRESH

Submitted: Report by Chief Executive (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) providing Board with information on proposed updates to Newcastle City Council's Housing Strategy.

J P Lee said that the Strategy was a key document that informed the work of YHN and other service providers in Newcastle. The strategy was structured around themes and priorities. The City Council was refreshing the strategy and seeking views from Newcastle Housing Partnership. YHN was represented on the Housing Partnership and had therefore been invited to take part in the consultation.

Initial feedback from YHN had been featured in the revised consultation document and section 2.3 of the report gave feedback on further discussions between the City Council and YHN officers.

J P Lee expressed a concern that the Strategy did not address the impact that dedicated student accommodation could have on some areas of the city, as property currently occupied by students would be left empty. Reference was

made to Heaton where there was a proliferation of 'To Let' boards.

The closing date for responses to the consultation document was 30 September and J P Lee suggested that Board might want to hold a dedicated session to consider their views on the strategy.

Questions/comments

- Board members expressed interest in a dedicated session.
- Concerns expressed by board members related to lack of available stock for people currently waiting to be housed.
- A Board Member commented that the increase in empty properties in certain parts of the city could be due to the economic downturn.
- A Board Member commented that although planning permission had been granted for the development of student accommodation, this did not necessarily mean that the developments would go ahead. He also commented that the number of 'To Let' boards in Heaton had been an issue for some time and the City Council was trying to address this. He pointed out that Newcastle had a lot less dedicated student accommodation than other cities.
- J P Lee commented that his point was that the strategy did not reflect on the consequential impact of dedicated student accommodation on communities.

RESOLVED – That a dedicated session be arranged for Board to discuss their response to the Housing Strategy refresh.

141 AREA BOARD REVIEW – INTRODUCTION OF THEMED MEETINGS

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

N Scott presented the report, describing how the themed meetings would be rolled out across the city. Meetings would be flexible to respond to the needs of an area and Housing Service Managers would take the lead in delivering meetings in their areas.

N Scott reminded Board Members that they had agreed to attend the themed meetings. A programme of meetings would be circulated so Board Members could decide which meetings to attend.

Questions/comments

- A board member asked whether the meetings would be themed across

YHN's areas of business and whether they would be repeated across all areas of the city. N Scott said that the meetings would be based on individual local neighbourhood interests and that mainstream issues would be dealt with in other ways.

- A Board Member commented that when the Area Boards had been set up, Board Members were not able to sit on Area Boards in their areas. He asked whether this arrangement would apply to themed meetings. N Scott confirmed that this would not apply and that Board Members would be able to choose which meetings to attend.
- A Board Member asked whether ward councillors would be informed of the meetings. N Scott confirmed that ward councillors would be invited.

RESOLVED – That a programme of themed meetings replace the Area Boards.

142 ETHNICITY MONITORING AND YHN CUSTOMER PROFILE

Submitted: Report by Chief Executive (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) providing an overview of the ethnic composition of Newcastle and YHN tenants and specific monitoring information on ethnicity and Lettings; Incidents of racial harassment reported through ARCH (Agencies against Racist Crime and Harassment).

A key point to note was that there had been a small increase in the number of registrations received from BME communities.

It was also noted that Governance and Personnel Committee would be considering a report on racist incidents reported through ARCH at the meeting on 4 August.

J P Lee said that it was intended that future reports would present information in a different format and illustrate the direction of travel.

Questions/comments

- A Board Member commented on the difficulties of using comparisons with the 2001 Census in view of the broader ethnic mix within the City.

J P Lee commented that although it was not easy to obtain current data for the city as a whole, in conjunction with the Asylum Service it should be possible to understand better the YHN tenant profile.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and referred to the relevant Newcastle City Council Scrutiny Panel.

143 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN YOUR HOMES NEWCASTLE

Submitted: Report by Chief Executive (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) on the three elements of equality and diversity and the organisation's approach to taking these areas of work forward.

Equality Framework for Local Government

J P Lee explained that the Framework replaced the Equality Standard for Local Government and that the new Framework consisted of three levels: Emerging, Achieving, Excellent. The Equality Standard for Local Government had five standards and how these would migrate to the new standard was set out in the report.

A progress report was to be considered by Governance and Personnel Committee and with their approval an Action Plan would be implemented to work towards achieving Level 2 of the new standard.

Key implications were:

- the use of peer review to evaluate performance. This raised questions about the consistency of approach and the training needs of peer reviewers;
- the framework was designed for local government and not for housing organisations, therefore some of the questions did not work well for YHN.

Stonewall's Equality Workplace Index

YHN had participated in the 2009 Workplace Equality Index, Stonewall's national benchmarking exercise showcasing Britain's top 100 employers for LGB staff. Although not reaching the top 100 index, the first submission had been encouraging and work was underway in preparing for the 2010 submission.

The report described the work being undertaken to improve performance on this equality strand.

Single Equality Bill

This Bill had been introduced into Parliament in April 2009 and the proposals would mean a radical change in UK discrimination law, the basic objectives being to strengthen and streamline the law and to support wider work to promote equality. The key considerations for YHN were described in the report.

Questions/comments

- A Board Member commented that in view of the proposed Equality Bill, it was surprising that the TSA did not see diversity as requiring a national

standard. It was explained that the TSA's view was that it was better to mainstream diversity across all services.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and the actions being taken under each element of work noted.

144 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRS

Submitted: Report by Chair (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes).

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the proposal to appoint two vice chairs be agreed;
- (ii) Board Members wishing to put themselves forward for the positions of Vice Chairs should inform the Company Administrator by 21 August 2009.

145 COMMITTEE STRUCTURE – UPDATE

Submitted: Report by Chief Executive (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) on progress being made in setting up the committee structure agreed by Board in March 2009.

Questions/comments

- A Board Member asked if board meetings would last longer because of a 6 weekly cycle. The Chair said that because there would be more scope for committees to deal with matters in depth, the Board would have a more strategic focus and it was not intended that meetings would last longer.
- A Board Member asked that Finance & Resources Committee's terms of reference were clear about Committee's responsibility for virements.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) Performance Committee meet on a six weekly cycle;
- (ii) the levels of delegations to committees described in section 4.2 of the report be agreed;
- (iii) the committee reporting structure to Board described in section 4.3 of the report be agreed;
- (iv) Equality and Diversity issues report to Board;

- (v) the Chair of the Strategic Independent Advisory Group report to Board twice a year on the work of SIAG;
- (vi) Finance & Resources Committee undertake responsibility for the Joint Consultative Committee arrangements with the Trade Unions.

146 YHN AND HRA BUDGET MEDIUM TERM PLAN UPDATE

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

J P Lee presented the report, noting that the net in year position moved from a surplus of £0.3m in 2009-10 to £0.2m in 2010-11 and to a deficit of £3.1m in 2010-12. The report set out the key issues that could affect the Medium Term Plan forecast in future years. Finance Committee would continue to monitor the budgets and if necessary would raise any concerns with Board.

Board was asked to agree an increase in the Investment Reserve of £1.277m

J P Lee then drew attention to the proposed reform of the HRA subsidy system. The reform aimed to find a long term, sustainable solution to improve or replace the current Housing Revenue Account subsidy system that would be fair to both tenant and taxpayer and fit with wider housing policy.

Consultation on the proposal was taking place and would finish on 27 October. He suggested that it would be useful for Finance Committee to consider a response to this document.

A copy of the consultation document "Reform of council housing finance" was available at the meeting for board members who wished to take a copy.

J P Lee also commented on the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) in 2010 when government would announce the spending profile for the next three years.

He also referred to the Government's pledge to fund new build that would affect the decent homes programme funding for ALMOs that had not yet been awarded two stars. If there was a reaction from those ALMOs, there might be a consequential impact on all ALMOs.

RESOLVED - That

- (i) the report be received and that Board receive a further update in November 2009;
- (ii) the Investment Reserve be increased by £1.277m;

- (iii) Finance Committee consider a response to the Government's proposed reform of council housing finance.

147 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Chief Executive's Report

Building Britain's Future – To supplement this item in the Chief Executive's report, a paper was tabled summarising the likely impact of the themes on the work of YHN.

Fire in high rise in Camberwell - In addition to the information contained in the report, J P Lee reported that:

- there were no blocks (above three storeys) in the city that mirrored the construction of the Camberwell multistoreys;
- the windows in the Camberwell multistoreys were made of aluminium;
- all 11 multistoreys had been visited;
- the programme to improve fire safety standards agreed by Board in December had commenced and four multistoreys had been improved to enhanced standards;
- Concierge staff had been advised to be more vigilant;
- because signage in multistoreys is in English, attention was to be given to displaying notices in relevant languages;
- there would be further discussions with Tyne and Wear Fire Authority when the review of the Camberwell fire was complete;
- fire safety measures would be reinforced in Homes + People.

Questions/comments

- A Board Member commented that one of the main reasons for fires was that smoke alarms did not work and asked whether there was contact with tenants to make sure that alarms were not tampered with. J P Lee said that hard wired detectors were in place and it was made explicit to tenants that they should not damage or interfere with equipment. There was an arrangement with Tyne and Wear Fire Authority to discuss fire safety plans with tenants.
- A Board Member confirmed that from personal experience fire alarms

and gas appliances were tested each year.

- A Board Member asked how often the Fire Authority inspected multistorey flats. J P Lee explained that the Fire Authority did not inspect multistorey flats. It was YHN's responsibility to inspect the blocks and make sure that the right equipment was in place and to carry out risk assessments.
- A Board Member said he understood that the Fire Authority would visit anyone and carry out an inspection. J P Lee explained that although the Fire Authority would visit individual homes, the Authority did not carry out fire risk assessments on multistorey flats.
- At this point, the Chair suggested that as the issue had generated a lot of interest, it would be advisable to have a dedicated discussion at a future meeting.
- The Chair referred to the Property Committee meeting on 20 July when a decision to approve the installation of UPVC windows had been deferred until the reasons for the Camberwell fire were known. Now that confirmation had been received that the windows in the block were made of aluminium he proposed that Board approve the installation of UPVC windows.

RESOLVED - That

- (i) The following items be received for information:
 - Delegated Decisions 15 May to 15 June 2009
 - Petitions Monitoring
 - Minutes of Governance & Personnel Committee held on 7 April 2009 ; Finance Committee held on 23 April 2009 ; Finance Committee held on 21 May 2009
- (ii) Approval be given to the installation of UPVC windows with easy clean hinges and self cleaning glass to Shieldfield House.

148 BOARD CALENDAR

It was noted that the August meeting would be cancelled.

The Chair informed Board that the Palatine update had been moved to November and he asked A Mirza, a member of the Palatine Steering Group, to comment on progress to date.

A Mirza confirmed that the Steering Group had met twice. A Business Plan was being produced. Processes were being put in place to make Palatine a sustainable business and align it with YHN work processes. An options appraisal was planned for September/October and would be presented to

Board. He said that Neil Scott's team should be commended for the work they were putting into this area of work.

149 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That in accordance with the organisation's Access to Information provisions, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of agenda items 17 – 19.