



Board

26 May 2009

(5.00 – 7.00 pm)

Present: S Murphy (Chair), G Allison, W Bowman, J Common, J Cuthbertson, W Drury, R Higgins, G Keating, A Mirza, P J Morrissey, M O'Callaghan, J Reid, R Renton, N Shukla, L Stephenson.

In Attendance:

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| J P Lee | - Chief Executive |
| R Atkinson | - Director of Finance & Resources & Company Secretary |
| 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 |
| B O'Doherty | - Head of Citywide Services |
| I Gallagher | - Head of Property Maintenance |
| W Keilty | - Manager, Customer Service & Improvement |
| L Henderson-Gray | - Customer Service & Improvement |
| P Hickey | - Central Services Manager |
| A Lister | - Finance Manager (Technical) |
| C Collard | - Your Homes Newcastle |

Observers:

| | |
|------------|--------------------------|
| V Dunn | - Newcastle City Council |
| P Bower | |
| L Chambers | |
| M Pearson | |

113 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from R Harral, J McLaughlin, D Slesenger.

The Chair informed Board that Roger Harral was in hospital following an accident. Because of complications, Roger was in intensive care, although improving slowly. A card had been sent to Roger wishing him a full recovery.

In the meantime, because of Roger's condition, the Chair did not expect that he would be able to carry out the responsibilities of Chair of Audit and Finance Committees in the short term. For that reason he proposed that Bill Drury act as Interim Chair of Audit Committee and Ammar Mirza act as Interim Chair of Finance Committee, if needed. The Vice Chair and John Cuthbertson (vice chair of Finance Committee) supported this proposal.

RESOLVED - That

- (i) Bill Drury be appointed as Interim Chair of Audit Committee, if needed.
- (ii) Ammar Mirza be appointed as Interim Chair of Finance Committee, if needed.

114 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

John Cuthbertson declared an interest in Agenda Item 9 as a resident of Cruddas Park.

115 MINUTES

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

Matters Arising

(a) YHN and HRA Revenue Budgets and Medium Term Plan Update – rent increase (Minute No 105 (a) refers)

J P Lee reported that correspondence from Communities and Local Government (CLG) had been tabled for information; this showed how complicated the formula was for calculating the decrease in the rent increase. CLG had confirmed that the difference in the subsidy would be paid to YHN.

It would take up to six weeks before tenants could be advised of their rent levels for the current year and there would then be a four week consultation period. This meant that it would be early August before the changes to the rent level were effective.

(b) District and Group Heating (Minute No 105 (b) refers)

R Atkinson reminded Board that at a previous meeting it had been agreed that changes to the future purchase of bulk gas be agreed with the Chair of the Time

Limited Committee. Officers had met with British Gas to negotiate prices for four months to the end of March to align with the financial year and prices for a full financial year. An offer had been made by British Gas but due to the volatile market, this had been withdrawn within 24 hours and a new increased offer made. As it had not been possible to contact the Chair of the Time Limited Committee about this offer, the Chair had agreed that the following offer be accepted:

- December 2009 to March 2010 22.45p per kwh (currently 30.2p per kwh)
- April 2010 – March 2011 23.44p per kwh

This was a total reduction of £367,000 for the period December 2009 to March 2011.

RESOLVED – That the Chair’s decision in accepting the offer detailed above be approved.

(c) Implications of Introducing YHN Tenancies (Minute No 106 refers)

The Chair took this opportunity to inform Board that the first meeting of Leazes Homes Limited had taken place on 22 May. Bill Midgley had been appointed Chair and Christine Tweedie Vice Chair.

(d) Use of HRA Reserves to fund capital projects (Minute No 107 refers)

S Breslin reported that Property Committee had approved a range of schemes from the Priority Investment Calculator (PIC) and these would be programmed and progressed throughout the year. R Atkinson also confirmed that in terms of the £4m reserve to be used to fund the projects, the financial outturn was favourable and that Finance Committee would be considering how any increased funds could be utilised.

(e) Review of Area Boards (Minute No 108 refers)

N Scott said that at the last round of meetings, area boards had been consulted on the Board’s decision to dissolve the area boards and replace them with themed neighbourhood meetings.

The East Area Board had decided not to meet in July. It was proposed that the chairs of Inner West and Outer West & North be asked whether they wished to hold any further meetings.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) in view of the proposal to replace area boards with themed neighbourhood meetings, no further meetings of area boards take place if this was the wish of the respective chairs.
- (ii) All area board members be thanked for their commitment and be

made aware of possible opportunities for involvement in the future.

(f) Items for Information – Petitions Monitoring (Minute No 109 refers)

The Chair of Property Committee informed Board that Property Committee had decided that a site visit to inspect the windows in Church Road and Clarkhill Walk, Newburn, was not necessary and the Committee had accepted technical advice about the windows.

116 BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Submitted: Report by the Chair (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) informing Board that George Allison was standing down from the Board.

The Chair explained that George was Chair of Newcastle City Council's Quality Places Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and because of the conflict of interest between his role on Board and his role on the Scrutiny Panel, he had decided to stand down from the Board.

The Chair thanked George for his commitment to YHN and the support he had given to board members and officers. George's considerable knowledge of council housing in Newcastle would be hugely missed. The Chair presented George with gifts as a thank you from everyone at YHN.

George said he was sorry to leave YHN and that he was pleased to have been involved in making YHN a success. He thanked board members and officers for their support and said he would continue to support YHN in their future development.

George's resignation meant that Board would lose one of its Vice Chairs and create vacancies on Audit, Finance and Property Committees. The Chair proposed that Board continue with one Vice Chair until the first meeting after the Annual General Meeting when the Vice Chair(s) would be appointed. He also proposed that the committee vacancies remain unfilled until the first board meeting after the Annual General Meeting and that Margaret O'Callaghan be appointed as Chair of Property Committee until September.

The process for the appointment of Vice Chairs would be reported to Board in July.

It was pointed out that George was also a member of the District & Group Heating Time Limited Committee, and the Chair of the TLC asked that George continue as a member.

It was noted that the City Council would confirm George's replacement at the Annual Meeting on 28 May 2009.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the resignation of George Allison from the Your Homes Newcastle Board be noted;
- (ii) Board continue with one Vice Chair until the first meeting after the Annual General Meeting in September.
- (iii) Margaret O'Callaghan be appointed Chair of Property Committee until the first meeting of Board after the Annual General Meeting in September;
- (iv) The vacancies on Audit, Finance and Property Committees remain unfilled until board membership was confirmed at the first meeting of the Board after the Annual General Meeting;
- (v) George Allison continue as a member of the District & Group Heating Time Limited Committee;
- (vi) The process for the appointment of Vice Chairs be considered by Board in July 2009.

117 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT APRIL 2008 TO MARCH 2009 (YEAR END)

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

S Breslin introduced the report reminding Board that at this stage there were no amber targets as targets had either been achieved or not at year end. Performance for 2008/09 showed more 'green' results than 'red', however the proportion of missed targets was significant.

Red Indicators

Board was asked to note that two of the 'red' indicators were extremely close to the target and also represented high performance levels. These were:

- The proportion of rent collected 98.41% against a target of 98.7%
- Satisfaction with the investment programme 89% against a target of 90%

The greatest causes for concern were the three satisfaction scores from the Status survey and sickness levels. The reasons for dissatisfaction were about how the organisation communicated and kept tenants informed. Work was being undertaken to understand the reasons for this dissatisfaction. Governance and Personnel Committee continued to monitor sickness levels address and look at ways of addressing this performance issue.

Green Indicators

These reflected some notable successes in areas of core business and included considerable reductions in both rent arrears and void re-let performance.

Questions/comments

- A Board Member asked whether there was some way of prioritising targets.
- A Board Member asked whether measures were in place to involve tenants in post project reviews and where people were reluctant to take part, were they being encouraged to do so. He was also disappointed with the low level of satisfaction relating to opportunities for participation in management and decision making.
- A Board Member commented that some people were not satisfied with the service they received at Customer Service Centres because staff were not able to answer questions about repairs that had been reported.
- A Board Member commented that while overall performance was good, it would be useful to know why there had been a downward trend from 2006/07 relating to tenant satisfaction with opportunities for participation in management and decision making and what, if any, were the learning outcomes.
- A Board Member asked why the three green targets on page 19 of the report showed a red downward trend.

In response, S Breslin said that the targets had been refined and for 2009/2010 Top 20 targets that were business critical would be monitored.

Tenants views were sought while improvement works were being carried out to their homes but people were reluctant to take part in post project reviews once the work was complete.

The indicator about tenant satisfaction with opportunities for participation in management and decision making was calculated from the annual STATUS Survey. The biggest decrease in satisfaction related to how tenants felt they were kept informed of things that might affect them. A workstream within the Service Improvement Plan was looking at how the organisation communicated with tenants and leaseholders. The workstream was also investigating how communication methods could be improved. Extra research was also being conducted with other tenants to try and understand the responses.

Referring to the deteriorating 'greens' these were targets that the performance committee would look at in more detail to prevent becoming 'red' indicators.

N Scott said that when people reported repairs at Customer Service Centres these were recorded onto a central system and staff should be able to access this. However, the City Council rotated Customer Service Centre staff every three months and this might be one reason for their lack of knowledge about a particular matter. He undertook to follow up this issue.

- A Board Member commented that the downward trend might be because people measured satisfaction against their expectations about the modern homes programmes and the tighter application of the replacement rules had caused some dissatisfaction.

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

118 COMPLIMENTS, COMPLAINTS AND COMMENTS REPORT YEAR END 2008/09

Submitted: Report by Director of Tenancy Services (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) providing an overview of informal and formal complaints for Quarter Four and the year end 2008/09.

N Scott drew Board's attention to section 2 of the report where performance and achievements for 2008/09 were described. During the year a Tenants Scrutiny Panel had been set up to look at Step 2 and 3 complaints and feedback from the Panel had been used to improve how the organisation engaged with customers. He drew attention to a Value for Money exercise conducted by HouseMark that showed that YHN's cost of dealing with a complaint was the lowest at £60.95 compared to the maximum unit cost of £246.13.

Questions/comments

- A Board Member commented that he would have expected that the East and West areas of the city would have had similar issues yet the figures showed a higher percentage of informal complaints in the East. He also said that if it was accepted that the sending out of letters about rent arrears at Christmas caused distress, could the organisation be more sensitive about when such letters were issued.

N Scott said that the issue about informal complaints had been recognised and more training was to be delivered so that staff had a better understanding of what should be recorded.

The purpose of the rent arrears letters was to make tenants aware of their responsibilities to pay rent but also to offer advice and support. It was acknowledged that the letter to those people paying by direct debit had been sent in error, and the organisation had apologised for this. N Scott also said that sending out the rent arrears letters in December gave tenants the opportunity to reduce their balance of arrears and rent collection records showed that many tenants took advantage of this.

- In response to a question about the collection of data relating to religion, it was confirmed that standard categories were used and the report was produced on data provided by tenants. However, the data would be checked to make sure that the right categories were being reported.
- A Board Member commented on the length of the report and asked whether it could be condensed. The Chair reminded Board that in future the full report would be scrutinised by Performance Committee and Board would receive a year end report.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the report be received;
- (ii) the categories used for collection of religion data be checked;
- (iii) Step 3 and Ombudsman complaints be included in future reports.

119 RIVERSIDE DENE REHOUSING PLAN

Submitted: Report by Director of Tenancy Services (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) updating Board on the planned programme of work with regard to lettings of the refurbished flats in Riverside Dene.

N Scott said that the first block to be handed over to YHN in April 2010 would be The Sycamores and those tenants who wished to be rehoused in The Sycamores should have an advance offer for new tenancies by mid June 2009. The report detailed how it was intended to move residents into each of the refurbished blocks and the allocation process.

N Scott advised Board that from the early days of the planned regeneration, discussions with residents and stakeholders had taken place about one of the blocks being designated with an age restriction. Within the local lettings plan The Larches had been designated as a block for those aged over 55 years. Board was asked to agree this designation.

Questions/comments

- A Board Member asked whether there had been any contact with public transport etc to make sure that the new name of Riverside Dene was being used instead of Cruddas Park.

B O'Doherty explained that there was a project plan to embed the new name although it was acknowledged that the transition period would be challenging.

- A Board Member asked whether the designation of The Larches would mean that people under 55 would have to wait longer to be re-housed.

It was explained that following contact with households that had been decanted in the first phase to other parts of the Cruddas Park neighbourhood, as well as other parts of the city, it had been ascertained that not everyone wished to move back to Riverside Dene as they either wanted to stay in their new home or had moved on. The other refurbished blocks would follow quickly so tenants would not have to wait too long to be rehoused.

- A Board Member supported the designation of The Larches as a block for those over 55 and commented on the popularity of similar blocks in other parts of the city.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the report be received;
- (ii) the approach to the allocation of refurbished flats for rent in Riverside Dene be approved;
- (iii) the designation of The Larches as a block for those aged 55 years and over be approved.

120 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Chief Executive's Report

J P Lee reported that at the meeting with Pat Ritchie, Regional Director of the HCA, discussions had taken place about the relationship between Your Homes Newcastle / Leazes Homes Limited / Newcastle City Council / HCA. Also discussed had been the scope for funding from the HCA for YHN to acquire existing homes at an affordable level and make them available at an affordable rent. HCA have agreed to undertake an evaluation of this proposal.

Petitions Monitoring

J P Lee gave an explanation about succession of tenancies and said that the current Policy was being revisited in respect of the second discretionary succession.

RESOLVED – That the following items be received for information:

- (i) Chief Executive's Report
- (ii) Delegated Decisions 14 April to 15 May 2009
- (iii) Petitions Monitoring
- (iv) Minutes of

- Audit Committee held on 15 January 2009
- Outer West & North Area Board held on 9 March 2009
- Inner West Area Board held on 12 March 2009
- Property Committee held on 16 March 2009

121 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – that in accordance with the organisation’s Access to Information provisions, the press and public be excluded for the remainder of the meeting.