



Board

28 April 2009

Items for Information

1. Introduction

The attached are for information:

- (i) Chief Executive's Report
- (ii) Health and Safety Quarterly Report
- (iii) Delegated Decisions 13 March to 14 April 2009
- (iv) Committee Feedback
- (v) Petitions Monitoring
- (vi) Minutes :
 - Finance Committee held on 19 March 2009
 - Governance and Personnel Committee held on 3 February 2009

2. Recommendation

Board is asked to receive these items for information.

Contact Officer:

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

Board

28 April 2009

Chief Executive's Report

Report by John P Lee

FOR INFORMATION

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report aims to give Board a taste of some up and coming national developments that are influencing the work that YHN is involved in currently and that they may be asked to look at in more detail at some future date.

2. Your Homes Newcastle Strategic Objectives

- 2.1 The current and future developments discussed in the report will influence the delivery of all our current strategic objectives:
- Support and care to communities
 - Three star excellent services
 - A quality workforce
 - Refurbishing and building homes

3. Key Issues

3.1 Housing Associations challenge current model of Housing provision

Five of the country's largest housing association groups have joined forces to publish a new report which challenges the current model for providing affordable housing and its ability to deliver the positive social and economic results for all those it is intended to help.

Well placed to promote ideas for the radical reform of housing policy the group of HAs, known collectively as the Housing Futures Network, provide over 250,000 affordable homes across the country and invest significantly in their residents and their communities.

The 'Homes for Tomorrow: New Directions for Housing Policy' paper by Places for People, Affinity Sutton, London and Quadrant, Riverside, and Gentoo points to the need for wholesale reform, arguing that the current model is broken and that we

need to find new ways to fix it.

Suggested fixes come under four headings:

- What is the purpose of social housing? Why should the State intervene, what outcomes should it expect, who should be helped and how?
- Which products are needed? What changes to current delivery models will overcome the impacts of the credit crunch, how can we increase and diversify supply and how could we use the existing stock more creatively?
- How should housing associations be accountable and to whom? Associations play a key role in delivering the nation's affordable housing. How should they balance the imperative for the effective governance required by complex businesses, with offering real accountability and influence to customers and other stakeholders?
- How should regulation work? What is its purpose, how can it protect the interests of tenants and public investment without stifling innovation and investment in new homes?

Keith Exford, Group Chief Executive, Affinity Sutton and spokesperson for the group, said: "We have not set out to be controversial but we do put forward the case for significant changes to the current approach.

We make radical, wide ranging proposals for the way we should invest in new homes and the way we use existing ones. We suggest reform of housing benefit, bringing it into the mainstream benefits system and ensuring it does not act as a disincentive to tenants looking for work.

We advocate the reform of the current approach to homelessness, opening up access to affordable housing to people with a far wider range of incomes, the reform of rents and a significant new duty upon local government to achieve a good neighbourhood standard.

And we propose that tenants should define the range and standards of services available to them with a pricing structure to match.

"Most of all we advocate the need to boost the supply of affordable housing, to bring an end to the system of extreme rationing which has characterised the sector over the past three decades."

The group's aim is to stimulate debate and influence the government to be bold when it contemplates the future direction for housing policy.

Copies of the report have already been sent to leading opinion formers, including the Minister for Housing and Planning, the Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP, Shadow Minister, senior civil servants and leading

Most of all we advocate the need to boost the supply of affordable housing, to bring an end to the system of extreme rationing which has characterised the sector over the past three decades."

The group's aim is to stimulate debate and influence the government to be bold when it contemplates the future direction for housing policy. This is something we need to keep a close eye on as any changes will impact on how we or our Charitable Subsidiary is able to fund the provision of future homes.

Copies of the report have already been sent to leading opinion formers, including the Minister for Housing and Planning, the Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP, Shadow Minister, senior civil servants and leading academics.

3.2 **Chancellor urged to invest £6.35 in social housing**

Chancellor Alistair Darling has been urged to invest in a national house building programme to give "immediate social and financial return" to the ailing economy.

Four leading organisations called on the Government to spend £6.35 billion over the next two years on 100,000 new social rented homes, which would create 150,000 construction jobs.

The Local Government Association (LGA), the National Housing Federation (NHF), the TUC and housing charity Shelter said housing provided an opportunity for "rebuilding economic activity".

In a letter to Mr Darling, the group said: "Investment in housing in the coming Budget would save and create thousands of jobs and apprenticeships, maintain skills in the construction industry, and safeguard our ability to build the homes Britain needs over the long term."

The group warned: "Without urgent action, the desperate need in this country for housing to meet people's needs, expressed in your commitment to build three million homes by 2020, will not be met."

The collapse of lending and house prices had led to a "severe drop" in housing supply which posed "serious challenges" for the house building industry, the group said.

The construction industry could contract by 20% by 2010 with a loss of around 447,000 posts, it added.

The letter states: "A loss of construction jobs and apprenticeships now would have longer-term effects.

"Experience from the 1990s recession is that house building does not automatically bounce back when the market recovers."

The number of households on social housing waiting lists in England has increased by more than 70% since 1997 and it is estimated there will be five million people on the waiting lists by 2010, the group said.

In the letter, copied to the Prime Minister, the group said: "In short, we believe that housing offers an opportunity to direct public finance to an area which will help stave off the worst of the recession, stimulate economic activity, and deliver the homes that this nation so desperately needs."

3.3 Priority for service personnel

Housing Minister Iain Wright has announced that ex-servicemen and women who are seriously injured are to be given priority for specially adapted social homes.

Councils are being instructed to treat seriously injured service personnel as a priority when allocating modified housing, under new guidance.

It will help to ensure better availability of specially adapted housing with features like walk-in bathrooms, wider door frames, lowered light switches, and entry slopes rather than steps, for service personnel as part of the Government's commitment to support those injured in the service of their country.

The guidance will also reinforce changes to help make sure all members of the Armed Forces can also apply for social housing in areas in which they were based during their service. Previously, service personnel were restricted by the need to demonstrate a local connection beyond having served there.

Iain Wright said: "It is right that our servicemen and women who are seriously injured fighting for their country are given the housing support they deserve."

The Council's letting's policy does not currently single out service personnel as a specific priority group but does take account of any applicants disabilities when awarding priority and allocating adapted homes. Additionally, it does take account of the frequent movement of service personnel in a favorable way when assessing length of residence. NCC will have to take account of the detail within this new guidance in its current review of the lettings policy.

3.4 The Conservative Party's new housing policies

The measures, outlined in a major new policy paper, are aimed at providing England's four million social tenants with genuine social mobility, and in restoring pride to rundown housing estates by helping to encourage social responsibility.

The paper, entitled 'Strong Foundations', also states that it will also ensure that local homes are built for local people, with the community – not bureaucrats in Whitehall – having the final say on the homes they want.

The Conservative proposals include:

Rewards for good behaviour - Tenants with a record of five years' good tenant behaviour will be offered a 10% equity share in their social rented property, giving them a direct financial stake in the state of their neighbourhood.

A 'Right to Move' - A comprehensive national mobility scheme that will allow good tenants to move to other social sector properties.

Supporting the low-cost housing sector – Measures will include strengthening shared ownership schemes so that those on intermediate incomes can part-own their home.

Local Housing Trusts - Villages and towns will be able to create entirely new community-led bodies with planning powers to develop local homes for local people, provided there is strong community backing.

Breaking the monopoly on empty government property - Local people will have new powers to demand the selling of empty or under-used government property.

Stopping the Whitehall imposition of unwanted development - Regional planning will be scrapped, enabling councils to revise their plans to protect Green Belt land and prevent the unwanted imposition of so-called eco-towns.

If there is a change in administration and these proposals become a reality we will have to wait and see how much they will cost or how they will be delivered and how they sit next to another Conservative pledge - to slash £800 million from the budget for investing in housing.

3.5 **A future for ALMOs within local communities**

The National Federation of ALMOs has produced a report entitled 'A future for ALMOs - within local communities' to contribute to the debate on the future of council housing and ALMOs. It looks in some detail at options which would enable ALMOs to continue to build on what they have achieved so far, working jointly with their local authorities.

In part it anticipates the outcome of the government's own review of the Housing Revenue Account system, but in part it considers options that could be pursued regardless of that outcome.

As ALMOs and councils consider their options for the future, with new sources of funding and developing new ways of working, the report considers that there are challenges in stretching the ALMO model so that it is fit for these new purposes.

The report also brings together the experience of several ALMOs and the thinking of expert advisers, and considers some of the legal, financial and community involvement considerations faced by any ALMO as they consider new ways of working – whether within the current policy environment or in the changed context expected as the outcome of the review of the HRA system.

4. Work in Progress

- 4.1 The TSA have eventually responded to the Chair about his invitation to visit YHN to experience the work of a 3* ALMO and to begin a conversation with them prior to any regulation activity. Unfortunately, they were unable to attend on any of the dates available so we will be revisiting this around September/October.
- 4.2 YHN's Chair and Pat Ritchie Regional Director of the HCA will be meeting as previously advised on 30 April to discuss how we can work with the HCA around issues such as Empty homes.

5 Next Steps

- 5.1 Will report regularly to Board about developments in these areas

Contact Officer):

Diane Creighton extension 28701



Board

28 April 2009

Quarterly Health and Safety Report

Report by: Director of Finance and Resources

For Information		
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1. Introduction

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

2. Recommendations

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

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 The Fire Safety Officer is continuing a prioritised programme of fire risk assessments to ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

The fire risk assessment programme for 2008/09 has been completed successfully. All sheltered housing schemes and 70% of multi storey flats (communal areas) now have fire risk assessments in place. Other premises requiring annual fire risk assessments have also been completed.

During 2009/10 the remainder of the communal areas of multi storey flats will be completed together with a prioritised programme of fire risk re-assessment of other YHN premises.

- 3.2 A number of health and safety training sessions have been held (see para 5.3).

Feedback from employees has been positive and we have achieved 96% attendance during 2008/09.

- 3.3 Health and safety inspections have been carried out in the period (see para 5.4). Following inspections of YHN premises, feedback is given to managers via a written report and a traffic light monitoring report. Recommendations are tracked to ensure progress against health and safety indicators.

4. Your Homes Newcastle Strategic Objectives

- 4.1 The management of health and safety and the regular monitoring of health and safety performance of employees contributes to the objectives of:-
- Support and care to communities
 - Three star excellent services
 - A quality workforce
 - Refurbishing and building homes

5. **Summary**

5.1 Accident statistics – 1 January to 31 March 2009.

There were 15 accidents to employees reported in the period.

Six involved slips/trips (three during the icy weather), one involved manual handling, two were due to a moving or falling object, four were due to hitting something fixed or stationary and two were other types of accident.

Most resulted in minor injuries but two accidents were reportable to the Health and Safety Executive as the employees were absent from work for more than three days.

The two reportable accidents involved Concierge staff. One employee twisted his left knee when he slipped whilst gritting the paths after heavy snowfall, and one employee severely bruised his foot when the wind blew a piece of wood whilst he was moving some contractors fencing which had blown down and was blocking the entrance to Moorland House. The contractors now display an emergency contact number for any future issues concerning fencing arrangements.

5.2 Incident statistics – 1 January to 31 March 2009.

There were 12 incidents reported during the period involving 14 employees.

One incident involved an employee of the Asylum Seekers Unit who received death threats via a mobile telephone call when carrying out his duties. The Police were informed. The employee was initially brought back to the office to carry out office based duties whilst further investigations took place. The employee is now back working on the patch, working in pairs and ringing in every hour to confirm whereabouts. No further threats have been received.

Two incidents involved actual physical violence towards staff. One involved a tenant who grabbed an Advice & Support employee's arm during an interview at a housing office. The tenant grabbed the employee's arm when the employee stated the interview was to be terminated due to the tenant becoming argumentative. The employee was upset by the incident but unhurt and was sent home. The tenant was issued a caution by the Police. The Manager wrote a letter to the tenant regarding their behaviour and instructed staff that future interviews must be conducted in pairs. The employee was offered counselling but declined it. The employee is to attend a refresher Personal Safety training course.

The other incident involved a concierge who was pushed in the shoulder when he asked a group of youths to disperse. No injury was sustained but counselling was provided.

All other incidents involved verbal abuse and/or anti social behaviour to employees by tenants or their family. Three incidents of verbal abuse/threats were made during a telephone call.

The tenants involved in the incidents have received letters regarding their unacceptable behaviour from the local manager and/or HASBET and a PRI placed on the internal system if appropriate.

All employees were supported by their managers following the incidents and offered further training or counselling if appropriate.

5.3 Health and Safety Training – 1 January to 31 March 2009

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

- Display Screen Equipment x 3 sessions – 37 employees
- Fire Safety Awareness x 3 sessions – 33 employees
- IOSH 'Working Safely' – 9 employees
- Health & Safety Awareness for Managers – 4 employees
- Sharps Awareness – 16 employees
- Re-lamping training x 4 sessions – 29 employees
- Personal Safety training x 4 sessions – 51 employees
- Use of stepladders training x 2 sessions – 15 employees
- Asbestos Appreciation training – 23 employees

5.4 Health and safety inspections – 1 January to 31 March 2009

The following premises/services were inspected during the period:

Benwell/Scotswood CHO within Customer Service Centre

Kenton CHO within Customer Service Centre

Two drop in centres used by Asylum Seekers Unit – Common Ground and St Josephs

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

6. Consultation

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

7. Work in Progress

- 7.1 The planned work for 2008/2009 has now been completed. This included health and safety inspections, fire risk assessments, reviewing and updating employee risk assessments and developing, revising and updating Health & Safety Codes of Practice. The Health and Safety Plan for 2009/10 is now in progress.
- 7.2 The Health and Safety training plan for 2009/10 is now agreed and included in the Organisational Learning and Development Plan for YHN.

8. Assets and Programming update

8.1 Construction, Design and Maintenance (CDM)

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

8.2 Asbestos Management

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

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

8.3 Legionella Management

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

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

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

9. Next steps

- 9.1 Board will receive the next quarterly report in July 2009.

Contact Officer(s):

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

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

Board 28 April 2009

Delegated Decisions – Schedule of non-confidential Delegated Decisions taken between 13 March and 14 April 2009

No	Directorate/Delegated Officer	Authorised Date	Subject	Cost/Budget Provision	Ward
1.	Your Homes Newcastle Atkinson Ross - (YHN Head of Corporate Service)	3/13/2009	Expansion of the ground floor Concierge office to accommodate additional staff	Cost £1,796 Code 1YCSA / B312	All Wards
2.	Your Homes Newcastle Atkinson Ross - (YHN Head of Corporate Service)	3/13/2009	Installation of a meeting room & adjacent IT storeroom / work area within the 2nd Floor Office Area.	Cost £3,770 Code 1YCSA/B312	All Wards
3.	Your Homes Newcastle Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	3/17/2009	St Anthony's Estate Phase 8 - Environmental Works	The capital expenditure of £507,359 will be met by the Housing Investment Programme.	Walker
4.	Your Homes Newcastle Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	3/17/2009	Community Care Alarms Upgrade Phase 3(b)	Funding of the total expenditure of £68,217 will be met from the Housing Investment Programme	All Wards
5.	Your Homes Newcastle Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	3/17/2009	154 ? 176 Westbourne Avenue Walker re-roofing works	Funding of the total expenditure amounting to £81,827 will be met from the Housing Investment Programme.	Walker
6.	Your Homes Newcastle Scott Neil - Head of Housing Management	3/26/2009	Repair & Maintenance Change Facilitation - Phase 3 - Additional	Code 1YFTM/D404 Cost £10,000 est (including £500 expenses)	All Wards
7.	Your Homes Newcastle Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	4/3/2009	Environmental Improvements at Milecastle House	Funding of the total expenditure amounting to £91,706 will be met from PEMS & SHIP	Walkergate
8.	Your Homes Newcastle Scott Neil - Head of Housing Management	4/3/2009	Additional work relating to the review & revision of Repairs & Maintenance Contract - Schedule of Rates	Cost - £3,150 Code - 1YFTM/D404	All Wards
9.	Your Homes Newcastle Breslin Sheila - YHN Head of Business Development	4/3/2009	Wreatham Place Play Area 54	Funding of the total expenditure amounting to £10,000 will be met from Housing Investment Programme / PEMS	Ouseburn

Board

28 April 2009

Committee Feedback

Report by Chief Executive

For Information	Area Implications:	ALL
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1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides quarterly feedback to the Board on the work of its committees, including the three Area Boards.

2. Your Homes Newcastle Strategic Objectives

- 2.1 The work of the Board's committees contributes to Three star excellent services.

3. Background

- 3.1 The following is a summary of the work of the Board Committees since the last feedback report in October 2008:

Area Boards – continue to monitor performance management, service standards and the modern home investment programme. The Outer West & North Area Board received an update on the Area Project Fund.

The Area Board Time Limited Committee has concluded its review on the future of area boards and this is the subject of a separate report to be considered by Board on 28 April.

Audit Committee – Audit Committee meets quarterly, and the next meeting will take place on 21 April when Committee will be considering the internal and external audit plan.

Finance Committee – Meets monthly and continues to monitor the Revenue Budget, Capital Investment Programme Movements, Investment Programme finance and Performance and the Repairs and Maintenance finance and Performance.

Committee has received quarterly reports on the Current Rent Arrears; the Financial

Statements; Right to Buy position; Income Monitor and Arrears management.

Reports were also received on : IT Strategy; Interim report on the Concierge Service Review; Corporate Procurement Strategy Action Plan progress; Use of HRA Reserves. Committee also reviewed the presentation of future training sessions.

Governance and Personnel Committee – Committee continues to receive bi monthly reports on sickness absence and the actions being taken to address this issue. Committee has received updates about the progress with Single Status, which aims to regularise salaries across professional disciplines.

In February, Committee received an updated on progress made within E & D with particular reference to developing community cohesion and achieving level 3 of the Local Government Equality Standard. Committee also received a briefing about the reporting of racist incidents in Newcastle and have asked for a further presentation on this topic at their next meeting.

Property Committee – has monitored Customer Satisfaction for Quarter 3 on both the Modern Homes Programme and the Repairs and Maintenance Contract. Committee also considered and commented on the joint performance and finance report for both the Investment Programme and Repairs and Maintenance contract.

Committee approved changes in repair categories and timescales subject to consultation and approved the retention of a 46 week gas servicing programme.

Committee also agreed a reduction in the gas servicing budget alongside a claim for additional expenditure for cleaning and clearing voids and accepted a discount for responsive repairs and rapid response.

The Painting Programme for 2009/10 was approved and comments were made on an Aids and Adaptations review.

4. Implications

4.1 There are no implications to this report.

5. Next Steps

5.1 Committees will continue to provide feedback on their work to Board on a quarterly basis.

Contact Officer: Maureen Dickson, ext 28624

Background Papers

- Board , Area Board and Committee Papers

Board

28 March 2009

Petitions Monitoring

Petitioners:	Residents of Harehills Tower, Montagu Estate		
Received:	6 April 2009	Response:	14 April 2009
Issues:	Petition relating to concerns about the behaviour of a neighbour.		
Response:	<p>The matter has been dealt with by the Housing, Anti-social Behaviour (HASBET). The lead petitioner has been informed that following earlier complaints the person concerned had been advised of the consequences of breaching his tenancy agreement.</p> <p>The petitioners claim that the person concerned is in breach of a behavioural order; however no behavioural order was signed by that person.</p> <p>A recent complaint about an incident involving the person concerned was dealt with and finalised by the police.</p> <p>The lead petitioner has been advised to contact HASBET if they wish to discuss the matter further.</p>		
Petitioners:	Residents of Church Road and Clarkhill Walk, Newburn		
Received:	6 April 2009	Response:	7 April 2009
Issues:	Petition objecting to the decision not to fit windows in Church Road and Clarkhill Walk.		
Response:	An individual survey is to be carried out on every property in these two streets (60 properties in total). The survey will be done from the inside and outside of each property and will be carried out under the supervision of City Design.		



Finance Committee

19 March 2009
(3.00 pm – 4.05 pm)

Present:

R Harral (In the Chair)
G Allison
W Bowman
J Cuthbertson
M O'Callaghan

In Attendance:

R Atkinson - Director of Finance and Resources
A Lister - Finance Manager – Financial Business Support
A Crute - Income Manager
K Embleton - Finance Manager – Revenue
M Dixon - Company Administrator and Board Support Officer
J Miller - Democratic Services

39 APOLOGIES

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

40 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the confidential minutes of the previous meeting and consideration of the following items:-

Democratic Services Service Level Agreement Review Report

43 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

It was agreed that a reference to be added into the action points that had been raised at the previous meeting stating that Finance Committee needed to examine deficits at some point in the year.

44 **ACTION PLAN REVIEW**

Submitted: Action List form of 19 March 2009 (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Officers updated as follows:-

(a) **Rent Arrears**

The request made at the previous meeting for an indication to be provided, by percentage, of the overall debt burden represented by those tenants who paid monthly, but because of when they paid were always in arrears could not be provided by the Northgate system. Therefore, A Lister was to undertake a piece of work analysing data on an annual basis and this information would be supplied as part of that exercise.

A Lister – December 2009

(b) **IT Strategy**

- Interim Update Report – G Ellingham – September 2009

(c) **Cashiering SLA**

A Crute had held an initial meeting with City Services. They had agreed/clarified the charging of process and the number of transactions that went through the payment engine. A Crute's team could now pull off and validate this information. It had been agreed that there would be no charge for additional services.

Update on SLA Discussions – A Crute – April 2009

45 **INCOME AND ARREARS MONITOR**

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

A Crute introduced the report which set out to the Committee the income and arrears decision at week 47. She highlighted that income to date was £715,000 more than estimated and total arrears had increased by £395,349. The estimated gain for the year was in the region of £790,000 which was very good news when compared with the earlier estimates.

(a) **Arrears**

Overall there had been an increase in arrears on the previous quarter, but they had not increased as much as they had in the same period in the previous year. It was noted that the red arrow should be pointing the other way as the increase in arrears was slowing down.

(b) **Sundry**

Former tenants arrears had increased. This was as had been expected due to the transfer from end of tenancies from current arrears and resurrection of – £340,000 of debt which was actively being pursued. A sum of £427,000 cash had been collected which was positive, an additional £23,000 compared with the same period last year.

(c) **Leasehold Invoices**

R Atkinson commented that a very good collection rate had been achieved for 07/08, particularly given that the invoices had been late in going out. A collection rate of 94% was expected for 2008/09. The target was 95% and it was hoped to hit that by the end of the year.

Work on what to do in connection with the “won’t pays” had been put on hold until the outcome of the LVT.

The members asked that their thanks be given to the team for their hand work in achieving this be recorded.

(d) **Major Works**

Currently, there was no formal recovery path for major works. The need to be clear on process mapping had been highlighted. It was intended to try and consolidate the major works recovery with the former tenants recovery path with the same process for both until the very end of the process which would be different for each. It was hoped that this would be in place by June 2009.

It was noted that a forecast column would be added to the table that showed the breakdown of the cash collected by the Income Debt Recovery Team for the next meeting.

It was AGREED that an update report be provided at the May meeting on the progress on the major works recovery path.

(e) **Government Initiative on Reducing Rent Increases**

R Atkinson reported that officers were still in discussions and awaiting further information in order to decide how best to act upon the government initiative to reduce the rent increase. It was not the best way to pass this on to tenants. It was agreed that a report be submitted to the May meeting on how this will be passed on to tenants.

RESOLVED – That:-

- (i) the report be received;
- (ii) an update report on the major works recovery path be submitted to the May meeting;
- (iii) an update report on how the rent increase reduction will be passed on to tenants to be submitted to the May meeting.

47 **YHN CAPITAL PROGRAMME MOVEMENTS**

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

A Lister introduced the report which detailed movements totalling (£2,210k). In 2008/09 Capital YHN programme, following the review of the programme with project officers. The main movements of the programme were detailed under Section 3 of the report and the detailed movements provided in Appendix 1. He highlighted the following key points:-

- Decent Homes Programme – Overall movement of (£1,490k) on Decent Homes Schemes.
- Bellway newbuild bungalows – Slippage of (£500,000).

It was noted that the problems being experienced in relation to the site for the newbuild bungalows would result in additional costs and would affect the completion date. There were abnormalities on the site with gas mains which had not been shown on the maps, discussions were being held with the contractors as to liability regarding this matter.

RESOLVED – That the movements detailed in the report be approved.

48 **REVIEW OF HRA RESERVES**

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

A Lister introduced the report, explaining the purpose was to consider the most appropriate level of reserves with a view to utilising some reserves to finance unfunded capital schemes.

The Committee did not disagree with the fundamental principle of allocating some of the £4m reserves for financing unfunded capital projects on a one off basis, but they wished to reserve the right at this stage to say from which areas those £4m reserves should come until after the outturn.

R Atkinson commented that due to the current position of the stock market the employers contribution to the pension fund would have to be increased at some point in the future.

RESOLVED – That:

- (i) it be agreed that £4m of reserves be used for financing unfunded capital programmes on a one off basis;
- (ii) Finance Committee reserve the right to identify where the £4m should come from until after the outturn.

49 **REVIEW OF FUTURE TRAINING SESSIONS**

RESOLVED – That:

- (i) a training session be arranged by R Atkinson, ~~K Embleton~~ and S Breslin after the next Board looking at priorities in the capital programme under funded schemes and financing;
- (ii) the Chair and R Atkinson to discuss topics for future training sessions.

50 **FINANCE COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2008/09 AND 2009/10**

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

It was noted that the position on service charges reported back in June 09.

RESOLVED – That the 2008/09 work plan and the provision of 2009/10 work plan which may be subject to change as a result of any committee/reporting cycle amendments be noted with the above addition.

Governance and Personnel Committee

3 February 2009

(5.00 – 7.15 pm)

Present: W Drury (Chair), G Keating, J McLaughlin, P J Morrissey, R Renton, N Shukla, L Stephenson.

In Attendance:

- R Atkinson - Director of Finance & Resources & Company Secretary
- R Smith - H R Manager
- A Hodgson - Head of Housing Management
- S Doyle - Diversity Manager
- M Dickson - Company Administrator and Board Support Officer

74 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from G Knox.

75 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 December 2008 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

(a) Volunteer Policy (Minute No 67 (c) refers)

The Chair confirmed that the additional information about releasing staff for volunteering had been provided. He had asked for some wording to be clarified with HR; R Smith undertook to follow this up with M Burn.

(b) Code of Conduct for Employees (Minute No 70 refers)

It was reported that Appendix 7 which provided guidance about Discriminatory Political Organisations and a policy prescribing BNP membership, had been removed. No other comments on the Code had been received from Committee members. Comments had been received from Management Team and these were being considered. The Code would then be consulted upon with Trade

Unions.

76 AREA BOARD REVIEW

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

A Hodgson reported that since November, the Time Limited Committee had considered reports on drivers for change; review of information provided to area boards; and a review of best practice. The Time Limited Committee had also considered the views of area board members and had looked at the mechanisms used across the city to gain the views of residents on housing issues, including activities led by both Your Homes Newcastle and Newcastle City Council. Gaps and areas of duplication had been highlighted, particularly in relation to the terms of reference of the area boards.

The Time Limited Committee would be considering a range of options for the future of the area boards and it was expected that a recommendation would be made to Board in April 2009.

Questions/Comments

- The Chair of the Time Limited Committee commented on the amount of work that was taking place with tenants and leaseholders and the amount of officer time involved in those activities. The Time Limited Committee had recognised that there were some areas of duplication. The Time Limited Committee had also acknowledged that information for tenants needed to be made available in a more interesting way. A Hodgson added that some of the activity was tied into Newcastle City Council's structure and that YHN officers attended Ward committees. The Chair also pointed out that housing officers worked closely with Tenant and Resident Association groups.
- A Committee Member asked whether those people who were engaging in activities were representative of YHN's customers and whether there were any gaps that should be addressed. A Hodgson commented that mechanisms for involving all of YHN's customers were improving and that the Tenant Involvement Team was able to identify any gaps.
- It was confirmed that the recommendations of the Time Limited Committee would be reported direct to Board.
- The Chair commented that Board would need to be confident that there were opportunities in place for tenants and leaseholders to feed information into YHN. A Hodgson commented that the Officer Working Group and the Time Limited Committee were committed to making sure that tenants and leaseholders were able to feed their views into YHN and would be considering ways in which people could be involved in a more proactive way in the future.

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

77 CORPORATE EQUALITY PLAN UPDATE

Submitted: Report by Diversity Manager (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes), updating Committee with progress made on the Corporate Equality Plan (CEP) 2007 – 2010 for the period ended 31 December 2008.

S Doyle reported on the amber and red targets as follows:

Amber

Knowing our customer base - Data collection was continuing, including evening and weekend visits to tenants. A data cleansing exercise was being conducted within Northgate so that type of disability could be entered onto the system.

Questions/comments

- A Committee Member asked whether it was a legal requirement to ask questions about religion and whether such questions were important or relevant.

The Chair commented that this information was useful when carrying out improvements to homes especially in relation to the position and type of facilities, etc. A Committee Member pointed out that this information was required under the equalities legislation because different communities had different cultural/religious requirements. S Doyle confirmed that the reasons for asking the question were explained in the covering document.

- A Committee Member asked whether all YHN staff had access to customer information and what the information was used for. S Doyle said this would be addressed in the Ethnicity Monitoring and YHN customer profile report later in the meeting.

Monitoring and Continuous Improvements – S Doyle advised that a report on progress with Equality Needs Impact Assessments would be considered by Management Team on 4 February.

Developing YHN's involvement in relation to Community Cohesion - S Doyle explained that this would be taken forward with Newcastle City Council; however progress to date was slow.

- A Committee Member acknowledged that although this was a joint project YHN should be making progress with what it was required to do. An Action Plan should be drawn up to take this area of work forward.

Red

Achieve Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government – S Doyle reported that informal peer assessment had been agreed with Gateshead Housing Company to take place during March 2009. Although there was some slippage, the target date for accreditation was March 2009.

Questions/comments

- A Committee Member suggested contacting Dialog about accreditation if Gateshead Housing Company could not meet the timescale.
- The Committee Member also commented that it was important for equalities to be embedded within the organisation. He was concerned that there was no further slippage with this area of work. Measures had been put in place to get back on target; however, he suggested that it might be beneficial to review the capacity in the organisation to deliver this key piece of work.

S Doyle replied that she was confident that the objectives had been reviewed and was confident that the work had progressed. The Chair commented that it would be useful to have a report to the next meeting to look at the reasons for the slippage.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the report be received;
- (ii) an Action Plan be developed to take forward YHN's involvement in relation to community cohesion;
- (iii) a report on the reasons for slippage with achieving level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government be submitted to a future meeting.

78 ETHNICITY MONITORING AND YHN CUSTOMER PROFILE

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

S Doyle explained that the report provided an overview of the ethnic composition of Newcastle and YHN tenants as a whole. The report also provided specific monitoring information on ethnicity and lettings and incidents of racial harassment reported through Agencies against Racist Crime and Harassment (ARCH).

This was the eighth report on ethnicity monitoring. An analysis of the information gathered in previous reports and actions taken was to be carried out and reported to Board.

Questions/comments

- S Doyle confirmed that individuals had categorised themselves as white other/white other joint nationality.
- S Doyle confirmed that there had been no action plans drawn up from the previous reports. However, this was now being addressed.
- A Committee Member referred to paragraph 2.3 of the report relating to work to develop YHN's role as a substantial employer to ensure that YHN achieved a workforce that was representative of the City's community. S Doyle confirmed that this referred to a workstream within the YHN Programme. A number of options were being looked at to raise YHN's profile as a employer that was representative of the City's community. R Smith added that HR was conscious that employment and recruitment practices should promote the benefits of working at YHN to all sectors of the community. More use of job bulletin boards in housing offices and job centres was being considered.
- A Committee Member commented that there was a need to think about how to target people who did not generally visit housing offices, etc.
- A Committee Member commented on the number of referrals from ARCH and the number of cases that had been investigated by YHN. S Doyle confirmed that only two cases were YHN issues that could be investigated. The Committee member asked whether she was confident that the other cases reported had been investigated by other partners. S Doyle explained that this information was outside of her area of work. The Committee Member asked for more information about the ratio of referrals and why only two could be investigated.
- The Chair asked whether there was a process for ensuring that contractors had reference to equality and diversity information. S Doyle was not able to confirm this. The Chair suggested this should be included in the action plan previously referred to.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the report be received and the above comments noted;
- (ii) the report be forwarded to Newcastle City Council's Safe, Inclusive, Cohesive & Empowered Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

79 SICKNESS ABSENCE

Submitted: Report by H R Manager (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes).

R Smith presented the report, noting that the projected outturn for the year to 31 March 2009 was an average of 11.3 days person compared with the previous two years of 12.78 and 12.2. It was considered that this steady improvement was capable of being maintained.

R Smith drew attention to the performance of each Directorate (paragraph 3.2 of the report). He also reported that the DHS system was being reviewed to make sure that the system responded to specific needs, in particular reflecting the shift patterns of concierge staff.

Analysis of performance now included a split between long term and short term absence and this improvement would help Management Team and the Absence Management Board to target improvement.

Questions/comments

- A Committee Member commented that to make the analysis of performance by directorate meaningful, it was necessary to know how many staff were in each directorate and also whether there were any patterns emerging at different grades.

R Smith commented that there were sections with high levels of sickness. He said that an exercise had been undertaken to analyse sickness by grade, by type of sickness, by directorate and this was being dealt with in 1-2-1 meetings with directors and cascaded to staff. It was noted that some managers had still not logged onto the system, and this information had been provided to Directors. The Chair asked for an update at the next meeting.

- A Committee Member expressed interest in the analysis of the type of sickness problems, because the nature of the tasks might reflect the type of sickness. This analysis could help managers identify training needs or aspects of the job that were not being managed well.

R Smith replied that an analysis had been done for YHN as a whole and Managers were being encouraged to do the analysis themselves for their divisions/teams. He also confirmed that the system could compare section by section, and directorate by directorate.

- A Committee Member said he hoped the review of the concierge service would be able to look at ways of making the job more interesting and suitable to the aptitudes of the people doing the job. R Smith informed Committee that HR staff were planning to visit concierge staff as it was hoped that they would feel able to talk openly to HR staff about sickness issues.
- A Committee Member asked whether it would be possible to find out how other authorities dealt with concierge issues. A Committee Member commented that the concierge service was unique to Newcastle and it

might be difficult to benchmark. The Chair commented that it would be useful to measure sickness performance in other organisations for a range of staff who had face to face contact with customers.

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

80 WORKFORCE WELLBEING

Submitted: Report by H R Manager (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) on the work currently being carried out by the Workforce Wellbeing Group to examine how the health and lifestyles of staff can impact upon an organisation's ability to deliver its business.

Questions/Comments

- A committee member asked whether ethnicity monitoring was carried out on the workforce. R Smith confirmed that a staff survey would be conducted during 2009 and this information would be requested as part of the survey.
- The Chair asked whether there was any limit to the amount of annual leave that could be carried forward from one year to another. R Smith confirmed that staff must take a minimum of 20 days (including statutory holidays). There was no limit to the amount of carry over although staff could not carry over more than a year's entitlement.
- The Chair asked whether it was possible for this policy to be reviewed. J P Lee commented that although it could be possible to review the policy, any change would involve a change to employees conditions of service and would mean a move away from Newcastle City Council's policy.

An exercise was currently underway to find out what proportion of staff carry forward annual leave each year and the categories of staff who did this. The Chair asked if this report to be provided to Committee for information.

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

81 NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 7 April 2009.

82 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Agenda items 9 and 12.