



Board

24 February 2009

(5.00 – 6.55 pm)

Present: S Murphy (Chair); G Allison, W Bowman, J Common, J Cuthbertson, W Drury, R Harral, G Keating, G Knox, J McLaughlin, A Mirza, P Morrissey, M O'Callaghan, J J Reid, R Renton, D Slesenger, L Stephenson.

In Attendance:

J P Lee	- Chief Executive
R Atkinson	- Director of Finance & Resources & Company Secretary
S Breslin	- Assistant Chief Executive & Director of Business
N Scott	- Director of Tenancy Services
D Creighton	- Executive Assistant to Chief Executive
M Dickson	- Company Administrator and Board Support Officer
M Burn	- Head of Support and Care
A Benbow	- Regeneration and Property Projects Manager
J Urwin	- Manager, Your Choice Homes
H Garbutt	- Manager, Concierge Service
P Hickey	- Manager, Central Services
S Doyle	- Diversity Manager
L Gray	- Your Homes Newcastle
L Dixon	- Your Homes Newcastle
S Clarke	- Your Homes Newcastle
J Johnson	- Your Homes Newcastle
C Collard	- Your Homes Newcastle

Observers:

J Hussain	- Newcastle City Council
H Emms	- Newcastle City Council
W Mapplebeck	- Newcastle City Council
K Anderson	- Newcastle Tenants Federation (from Item 84)

73 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from N Shukla.

74 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

J Cuthbertson declared an interested in agenda item 9.

75 ITEMS RAISED, NOT ON AGENDA

(a) Question to Board

The Chair read out the following question to Board from Mr Morauf, 94 Hotspur Street, Heaton, Newcastle upon Tyne:

“ Is Board aware that internal walls in these properties are open to the outside area via the air bricks and therefore causing heat loss and that due to the requirements for fresh air in a room with a back boiler, the room is cold because of the ventilation. ”

Board noted that City Design had visited the property and confirmed that the air bricks were there to provide ventilation to the under floor area (not air to boiler) to assist in preventing dry rot etc. There were ventilation grilles to the front and back doors and also floor grilles that provided ventilation to the back boiler/fire. The Investment Delivery Manager would arrange for a visit to check if all these grilles were required. The tenant apparently had issues generally about the thermal performance of the property and Warmzone were due to visit the property on 2nd March to carry out a full survey.

RESOLVED – That the above response be noted and Mr Morauf informed accordingly.

76 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED - That in accordance with the Organisation’s Access to Information provision, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of agenda items 6 – 12.

Having considered the confidential items, the remainder of the meeting was opened to the press and public.

84 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

(a) YHN Charitable Subsidiary (Minute No 61 refers)

The Chair advised Board that the word “handicapped” had been removed from Object 3 of the Memorandum of Association.

(b) YHN and HRA Revenue Budgets and Medium Term Plan Update (Minute No 63 refers)

A copy of an article that had appeared in Inside Housing was tabled for information. J P Lee commented that there was widespread disappointment about the rent increases imposed for 2009/2010. No reply had been received from the Minister of Housing to the Chair’s letter. The Local Government Association was urging government to listen to their concerns about imposing large rent increases on tenants in the current economic climate.

85 YOUR CHOICE HOMES UPDATE

Submitted: Report by Director of Tenancy Services (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) updating Board on the work being carried out regarding lettings and Your Choice Homes (YCH).

Sections 1-3 of the report contained information on a range of activities being undertaken with regard to the Choice Based Lettings Policy (CBL). Section 4 set out the proposed local lettings plan for the new build bungalows, for which Board approval was sought.

Questions/Comments

Lettings Policy

- A Board Member asked what would be the cost to the organisation of an under-occupation incentive scheme.

N Scott replied that the anticipated annual cost would be up to £10,000. N Scott said that funding had been secured from Government for the sub regional scheme and would be used to employ a Project Officer to further develop it. It was anticipated that mutual exchange schemes would be able to be set up.

- A Board Member asked whether existing tenants had a right to move into a smaller property. It was confirmed that tenants did not have exchange rights. The Board member commented that there should be a process whereby tenants with length of residency could have some choice in choosing smaller properties. H Emms commented that this area of work was now within his responsibility and would be followed up. J P Lee added that at the last review of the CBL Policy, YHN had put forward a case for a percentage of properties to be kept for people with length of residency and a number available for people with priority cards; however, the City Council

had not taken this forward.

- A Board Member commented that in practice the CBL system did not provide any choice for tenants. There was a need for two bed properties and there should be an incentive to allow tenants to move on.
- A Board Member commented that most people wanted to stay in the area in which they lived, and incentives would not necessarily encourage people to move elsewhere.

Local Lettings Plan

- A Board Member asked what weighting was applied to those shortlisted for the new build bungalows. N Scott explained that allocations would be based on urgent needs (likely to be a medical priority) but if there were no priority needs, allocation would be on length of tenancy. The Board Member sought further clarification about the criteria weighting. N Scott further explained that applicants would have to be eligible for a bungalow and preference would be given to those in urgent and immediate need to move. He also explained that the Policy criteria meant that, for example a single person could not be considered for a 3 bed property.

RESOLVED – That

- (i) the report be received and the above comments noted;
- (ii) the approach to the allocation of new build bungalows for rent be approved.

86 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT QUARTER 3 (April to December 2008)

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

In presenting the report, S Breslin asked Board to note targets that had been met or exceeded. These included:

- reduction in net rent arrears;
- reduction in the average relet time;
- number of homes made decent;
- maintaining successful INLINE tenancies for 12 months;
- installation of child safety equipment packages.

There were still some areas where improvements were needed, including:

- satisfaction with the Investment Programme;
- reducing the number of days sickness;

- satisfaction with opportunities for participation in management and decision making.

This last point related to the responses from the STATUS Survey. S Breslin commented that at the last meeting she had indicated that this might be a national trend, however further analysis had revealed that this was not the case. The Performance Policy team was now carrying out further analysis of the results to try to identify which elements of the service people were dissatisfied with

Questions/Comments

- A Board Member asked whether it was possible that the questions asked were not clear. S Breslin explained that the questions were suggested by Government. She added that there had been an increase in people saying they were neither satisfied/nor dissatisfied. Greater analysis of the reasons for these statements was needed.
- A Board Member asked whether the rent arrears target should be green. S Breslin replied that it was based on a trajectory through the year which indicated that the target would be green at the year end.
- The Chair asked whether it was possible to find out why there was a lower level of satisfaction with the overall housing service by the BME community. S Breslin replied that while it was not possible to revisit people who had responded to the survey, an exercise was being conducted with people who engage with the organisation to try and understand the low level of satisfaction.

RESOLVED – That the report be received and the actions being taken to improve performance approved.

87 COMPLIMENTS, COMPLAINTS AND COMMENTS REPORT QUARTER 3

Submitted: Report by Director of Finance and Resources (previously circulated, copy attached to Official Minutes) giving an overview of informal and formal complaints for Quarter 3, 2008/2009.

Questions/Comments

- A Board Member stated that he hoped that the error in sending out rent arrears letters to customers paying by direct debit would not happen again. N Scott said that steps had been taken to make sure that this would not occur in the future. A written apology had been made to each customer who had received a letter in error.
- A Board Member referred to the complaints process satisfaction survey, noting that c48% of people were unhappy with the way in which their complaint was dealt with. The Board Member asked whether there was information available about the type of complaints and also whether there

was an Action Plan in place to address dissatisfaction with the process.

L Gray explained that where a customer was not satisfied, the Investigating Officer would contact the individual to find out the reason for their dissatisfaction. When compared with other organisations, the satisfaction level was not hugely different. L Gray also confirmed that if a customer was not satisfied with the response they could go to a Step 3 complaint and then to the Ombudsman

The Chair commented that it would be interesting to have further information about the complaints, whether satisfaction levels were flagged and how this might work.

- A Board Member commented that generally people would not be satisfied if they didn't get the response they wanted to their complaint.
- A Board Member questioned the value of the question as the complainant would not differentiate between the outcome of the complaint and the way in which the complaint was handled.
- A Board Member gave an example of how a matter had been dealt with and suggested that people's responses might be determined by how quickly their requests had been responded to.
- J P Lee asked Board Members to keep in mind the context of complaints. For example, the number of packages completed compared with the number of complaints received. He suggested that Board might find it useful to receive more detail about the complaints.

RESOLVED that - the report be received and the above comments noted.

88 ENGAGEMENT THROUGH LEISURE AND DIVERSIONARY ACTIVITIES

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

J P Lee updated Board on progress made on the project for diversionary and leisure activities for tenants and leaseholders. He reminded Board that following the Audit Commission's comments that the approach to diversionary activities was not structured, a temporary project officer had been appointed to identify a solution to this area of weakness.

Key activities delivered during the short term project were detailed in section 3 of the report and J P Lee commented that the activities had been well received. He also commented that an evaluation of the long term impact of the project would be carried out in partnership with the University of Northumbria.

S Clarke, Project Officer, spoke about how the project had helped to engage a wide age range of individuals. He said that the intergenerational bowling

programme aimed to engage older residents and young people and it was hoped this would have a positive impact on changing perceptions that different generations have about each other.

Question/comments

- A Board Member asked whether the activities were aimed exclusively at YHN tenants, as it was understood that people who were not YHN tenants had been chosen to take part in activities. J P Lee replied that YHN had a social responsibility to engage with the wider community and there were advantages to YHN in doing so. The project aimed to lever in money from other sources. Rather than set up activities in isolation, YHN bought places on existing programmes of activity. If tenants had not been able to take part in the activity, they could have contacted YHN and it might have been possible to run another session.
- A Board Member asked whether coaching was voluntary and whether coaches were vetted. J P Lee replied that there was a mix. For example, Access to Basketball initiative was run by professional basket ball players who gave their time voluntarily. In other circumstances, coaches could be employed by YHN or the NCC and would be vetted. It was further confirmed that Access to Basketball coaches were trained, CRB checked and trained in first aid.

RESOLVED - that

- (i) the report be received;
- (ii) the establishment of a Diversionary Officer position be approved and an appropriate budget created to allow this area of work to be taken forward.

89 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

RESOLVED that – the following items be received for information:

- (i) Delegated Decisions
- (ii) Committee Feedback
- (iii) Minutes of Finance Committee held on 22 May 2008 and Governance & Personnel Committee held on 2 December 2008.