



Board

28 April 2009

Review of Area Boards

Report by Director of Tenancy Services

| Decision | Area Implications | All |
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| <p>Executive Summary</p> | <p>In June 2008, Board agreed to set up a Time Limited Committee to carry out a review of Area Boards. Committee members have now considered a number of reports which have explored the issues with the current structure, best practice from other two and three star organisations, a gap analysis against the existing terms of reference and an analysis of information presented to boards.</p> <p>The Committee have concluded that area boards should not continue in their current format and should be replaced by a programme of themed meetings delivered locally which respond to the needs of local communities and compliment the existing mechanisms for involvement.</p> | |
| <p>Recommendations</p> | <p>Board is asked to agree :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To dissolve area boards in their current structure following the Annual General Meeting in September 2009. 2. To agree to establish a programme of neighbourhood meetings across the City. 3. To attend neighbourhood meetings on a regular basis. | |

| Business Implications | |
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| <p>YHN Mission and Strategic Objectives</p> | <p>The recommendations in this report support the following strategic objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and care to communities • Three star excellent services |

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| Value for Money/Efficiencies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The estimated costs of servicing area boards have been considered as part of the review. The two significant costs are recruitment of board members and officer time spent supporting the process. Whilst members of the time limited committee felt these costs were not excessive, they felt that outcomes did not represent value for money. Existing resources could be redirected to achieve a greater outcome. |
| Resources (financial, property, technological or human) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> See above |
| Impact on Services/Performance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance against key indicators and service standards would be presented at area meetings. Meetings would be supported by local managers who would be accountable for performance. |
| Outcomes for tenants/leaseholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendation to hold area based meetings would mean that performance against key indicators and service standards would be presented to residents locally. Feedback from estate walkabouts and Housing Project funded schemes would also be presented. Residents would be able to influence the agenda of meetings. Meetings would be less formal and encourage participation. |
| Risk (reputation, relationship) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The review has concluded that area boards are ineffective and do not deliver wholly against the existing terms of reference. To continue to operate in the current format would fail to address the issues identified and may impact on YHN's reputation. |
| Environmental | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no environmental and sustainability issues associated with this report. |
| Legal Implications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should board agree the recommendations, YHN will need agreement from DCLG before changes to the existing Area Board Structure are implemented. Newcastle City Council would also need to |

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| | agree to the proposed change which will require an amendment to the current management agreement. |
| Equality and Diversity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The time limited committee has concluded that Area Boards in their current structure do not encourage participation. The proposed recommendations will allow officers to respond to issues of concern in neighbourhoods. • Targeted promotion will be carried out to ensure representation at meetings. DDA compliant venues will be used whenever possible. Interpretation services will be offered. |
| Stakeholder Involvement/Consultation (planned or already carried out) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The time limited committee was made up of representatives from the main board and each of the three area boards. The Strategic Commissioning Manager, Strategic Housing represented Newcastle City Council. Newcastle Tenants Federation also had a member on the Committee. • Officers from across YHN sat on the officer working group supporting the committee. • Targeted work was carried out with Area Board members and young people. |

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| Background papers | <p>Review of Area Boards – 24 June 2008</p> <p>Reports to time limited committee – November 2008 to January 2009</p> |
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| Contact officers | Allison Hodgson: Head of Housing Management. Tel: 278 8713 |
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Review of Area Boards

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In June 2008, YHN Board agreed a recommendation to establish a time limited committee to review the existing area board structure.
- 1.2 The report to board in June 2008 detailed the background into establishing the three area boards based on guidance from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It also outlined some of the key issues in operating an area board structure. In summary, these included problems with recruitment and retention of area board members and poor attendance at meetings. Attempts to improve information flow and communication with main board through Chairs meetings had been unsuccessful. Finally, area boards had been unable to develop an effective local perspective which was evidenced by the lack of public attendance at area board meetings.

2. Background

- 2.1 The time limited committee was made up of representatives from YHN board and the three area boards. Other representatives on the committee included the Strategic Commissioning Manager from Strategic Housing, Newcastle City Council, a representative from Newcastle Tenants Federation and was led by the Head of Housing Management.
- 2.2 The time limited committee was supported by an officer working group which included officers from across YHN. Representatives from each of the area boards were nominated and invited to join the officer working group although full representation throughout the review process has not been possible.
- 2.3 Since November 2008, the time limited committee met on a monthly basis and received a number of reports to inform the review process. This has included reports detailing the drivers for change behind the review, feedback from existing area board members, a comprehensive review of information previously presented to area boards, a review of best practice and finally a gap analysis on the current mechanisms relating to community engagement based in parallel with the area board terms of reference.

3. Findings of the Review

3.1 Drivers for change

- 3.1.1 There are currently eight vacancies (from a total of forty two seats) across the three area boards. Vacancies fall across all three

constituent groups. Generally, recruitment has been carried out at the same time as recruitment to the main board. Costs of recruitment have been calculated at £16,360.

- 3.1.2 There are a number of other costs associated with running area boards which includes support from democratic services under the Service Level Agreement, venue and catering costs and travel expenses. One of the significant costs incurred in administering area boards is the officer time spent providing information, writing reports, following up actions and attending meetings. The cost of staff time has been estimated at just under £17,000 per annum.
- 3.1.3 In total, the cost for supporting area boards over a one year period has been estimated at £47,035.00. Whilst members of the committee did not feel that this cost was excessive, when considered along with the outcomes from area boards, members felt that this investment should deliver a greater benefit to the company.
- 3.1.4 Attendance at meetings is consistently poor, with meetings regularly being inquorate. Attendance to the Inner West area board has been particularly low, with officers outnumbering board members on a regular basis.
- 3.1.5 Members of the public rarely attend area boards. Feedback suggests that the formal approach and presentation of information discourages participation from the local community. A specific piece of work with young people suggests that the current structure of meetings does not encourage their involvement.

3.2 **Feedback from area board members**

- 3.2.1 As part of the review process, existing board members were asked to feedback their views on the existing structure through an exercise where members were asked to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats from the current structure. Area board members were asked to pay particular consideration to the purpose of area boards, relationships with the main board, membership and representation, attendance and meeting logistics, value for money and other opportunities for engagement both within YHN and within the wider community.
- 3.2.2 Feedback from members was generally consistent across the three areas and mirrored the discussion held at the first meeting of the time limited committee and feedback previously given by area board members.

In summary:

- i. Skills, knowledge and experience of area board members was not being utilised.
- ii. Members had good links with existing Tenants and Residents Associations although relationships with the area boards could

be strengthened.

- iii. Area boards have no budgetary responsibility and no decision making powers.
- iv. There were no clear links to YHN Board and no clear sense of purpose.
- v. Attendance at meetings was poor and existing terms of reference were not reflected in the agenda.
- vi. All three area boards acknowledged the need for improved publicity and marketing and a less formal structure.
- vii. There was a risk of duplicating what was happening elsewhere in the organisation.

3.3 Information presented to Area Boards

3.3.1 As part of the review process, members received a report which analysed the types of information that were reported to Area boards between January 2007 and November 2008, comparing this information to the terms of reference set at their inception. A suite of standard reports are presented at each meeting which include performance information, an update on the modern homes programme, performance against service standards on a rotational basis and a regular update on Housing Project funded schemes. Area boards have also received reports remitted from board mainly for information. Finally, information has been presented in response to area board members concerns on a themed basis.

3.3.2 Predominantly, the information presented to area boards relied upon paper based written reports, occasionally accompanied by officers' presentations. The scope for any discussion and comment has been predominantly limited to the report contents. Information presented to the board, particularly statistical information, has generally been limited to an area wide level and may have masked local diversity or variation in the performance achieved against these targets at neighbourhood level.

3.3.3 Recommendations made by officers have been limited to seeking views of local boards and making comments on information presented or else to discuss the decisions that have been made by main board.

3.4 Review of best practice

3.4.1 At the outset of the review, consultants working for the Housing Quality Network who were experienced in working with other organisations in this field advised that whilst it was helpful to look at two and three star organisations, any recommendations for change would need to meet our needs.

3.4.2 To inform the process, a review of best practice was completed which focussed on other two and three star ALMO's. A number of other ALMO's had reviewed their area board structure and dissolved area boards. Examples of alternative activity included Tenants panels, task panels, focus groups and customer panels. Although useful, the committee felt that no one model adopted by other organisations would meet YHN's needs.

3.5 **Terms of Reference / Remit of Area Boards**

3.5.1 At the inception of YHN's board and committee structure, terms of reference were agreed for the operation of Area Boards. In order to effectively carry out these terms of reference (see appendix 1) information needs to be presented to local boards that effectively allow board members to discharge these functions.

3.5.2 Of the existing terms of reference, the information presented to Area boards allows only a partial discharge of these with some areas being stronger than others. Hence local performance is measured at an area level against agreed and consistent delivery plan targets but may not be available to neighbourhood level that might help liaison with and engagement of local tenants.

3.5.3 In other instances, the information presented to Area Boards has only partially covered the terms of reference. For example, whilst information has been presented on local regeneration initiatives, this has not been systematic.

3.6 **Gap analysis – resident involvement**

3.6.1 The committee considered a detailed report which established YHN's position in resident involvement in relation to the role of Area Boards. The report considered the many mechanisms used across the City to gain the views of our residents on housing issues and included both YHN and Newcastle City Council led activities. The report identified perceived gaps that exist, highlighted areas of duplication in involvement, particularly in relation to the terms of reference of the current area board structure. Appendix 2 details areas of duplication in relation to the current remit of area boards. The report also estimated the amount of officer time involved in activities which ranged from officers attending Tenants and Residents Association meetings on the estates they manage to attendance at Newcastle Tenants Federation meetings.

3.6.2 At the time of the area board review, a number of other reviews were taking place including a review of the committee structure at Newcastle Tenants Federation and an internal review of YHN's Estate Walkabouts process. A commitment for YHN officers to contribute to the City Councils Neighbourhood Management plan had also been made.

- 3.6.3 When receiving this report, members acknowledged the significant amount of work which already takes place and were keen for any recommendations coming out of this review to compliment the work already happening and not to cause duplication. Appendix 3 details existing methods of engaging tenants. Our approach to resident involvement was described as outstanding by the Audit Commission in the last inspection, with residents at the heart of the business. Committee members were keen to build on the good practice that exists and add value to that area of work.
- 3.6.4 Members were particularly interested in the work which had already taken place in developing local agreements in three areas of the City and felt that this was an excellent way involving residents in measuring front line service delivery and providing residents with information on what was happening in their area. They acknowledge however the development of local agreements need to be driven from members of the Community and Citywide would not be possible.
- 3.6.5 Importantly, in relation to the original remit of area boards contained in the terms of reference, a number of areas of duplication were identified. These are detailed in appendix 2.
- 3.6.6 The remainder of the terms of reference for Area boards (see appendix 1) cover feedback to the main board, attendance, membership, meeting frequency and identify the lead officer. Feedback to board is currently achieved by area board minutes being circulated with board agenda's. Issues of attendance and membership have been discussed earlier in this report. The terms of reference identify the Area Director as Lead officer for Area Boards. This post no longer exists.

4. Options

- 4.1 As information was presented throughout the review process, issues which needed to be addressed became clear and options discounted. At the last meeting however, members of the time limited committee considered a range of options which were presented to stimulate debate. These options were:
1. Retain area boards in the current format.
 2. Abolish area boards.
 3. Abolish area boards in their current structure but replace with tenant panels.
 4. Support the roll out of area agreements and deliver themed meetings in response to local issues.
 5. To hold main board meetings in the community on a rotational basis and actively encourage residents to attend.
 6. Link in with the 'Estate walkabout' process and hold themed

meetings in neighbourhoods to provide feedback to residents.
Committee agreed on a hybrid of the above.

4.2 Although the operational detail needs to be agreed, members of the time limited committee agreed to the following broad principles which would form the basis of the recommendations made to board:

- To dissolve area boards in their current structure.
- To run themed meetings in neighbourhoods across the City to respond to issues raised by local residents. The geographical area covered by a neighbourhood meeting would not necessarily be co terminus to Community Housing Office operating boundaries or ward boundaries, but would be identified at a local level and vary across the City.
- At each neighbourhood meeting, standard items of information would be presented which would include local performance against a number of key indicators including service standards. Residents would have the opportunity to influence which indicators they received information on. Feedback from estate walkabouts and potential Housing Project Fund schemes would also be discussed. It is envisaged that information will be presented in a less formal way than the current structure allows, including workshops and participatory activities.
- Where local neighbourhood agreements are operating, the neighbourhood meetings could be used to escalate issues of under performance.
- Officers and members of the community could ask for issues of local concern, for example anti social behaviour within an area or increasing numbers of voids to be included in the agenda.
- Local housing staff would continue to engage in Newcastle City Councils Ward Committee structure and would continue to be committed to developing Neighbourhood Agreements.
- Members of the board would be invited to attend neighbourhood meetings on a regular basis. This would improve links between the board and residents.
- Board and Ward Committee would receive a summary report on the issues discussed and raised by residents.
- The neighbourhood meetings would be responsive to the needs of the local community who would be able to influence the agenda and would increase accountability of local staff in key performance areas.

5. Implications

- 5.1 The dissolution of the area board would mean that there is no longer a role for area board members. It is envisaged that existing tenants' representatives would support the new structure. Council representatives would continue to be involved with their constituents through existing structures. Independent representatives may wish to apply to become members of the Strategic Independent Advisory Group.
- 5.2 If board agree to the recommendations contained in this report, it is envisaged to implement the proposed changes in September 2009 following the Annual General Meeting. An evaluation would be carried out after 12 months and a report brought back to board.
- 5.3 In terms of governance, the Area Board structure was included in the bid to government to set up the ALMO, although it is not referenced in the Memorandum and Articles of Association. Approval from the Department of Communities and Local Government would need to be sought before implementation. Similarly, the operation of area boards is included in our management agreement with Newcastle City Council. Again, any amendment would need to be agreed.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 Board are asked to agree :
1. To dissolve area boards in their current structure following the Annual General Meeting in September 2009.
 2. To agree to establish a programme of neighbourhood meetings across the City.
 3. To attend neighbourhood meetings on a regular basis.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 Should board agree to the recommendations in this report, an officer working group will be established to work up the operational detail required.
- 7.2 Contact would need to be made with Newcastle City Council and Department of Communities and Local Government.

Area Boards Terms of Reference

A. Remit

- To contribute to the development, implementation and monitoring of the Capital programme in the area
- To monitor local performance against Your Homes Newcastle Delivery Plan targets
- To develop, implement and monitor local tenant participation compacts
- To comment and make recommendations to the Area Housing Director on the proposed spend of any budgets delegated to an Area Level
- To actively liaise and engage with tenants in the area to identify local priorities and issues of concern, draw up action plans to address these, implement and monitor their delivery
- To work in partnership with local agencies in identifying and addressing issues of anti social behaviour
- To monitor the local implementation of the Your Homes Newcastle Equality and Diversity policy and ensure that services reflect the diversity of community needs in the area
- To work alongside the City Council's area and community planning structures, particularly in addressing the regeneration of the City and the development of the Council's approach to neighbourhood management
- To raise with the Main Board any issues of local concern and to facilitate communication between the Main Board and Area Boards
- To make to the Main Board and/or the Chief Executive any recommendations it considers appropriate to
 - (a) help improve the operation and performance of Your Homes Newcastle and the services provided by it
 - (b) better meet the aspirations and needs of its area.

B. Reporting to YHN Board

Area Boards will report back to the Main Board quarterly

C. Proposed Membership

The composition of Area Boards has already been agreed by the Board – please refer to the Shadow Board agenda for 25 February 2004.

D. Meeting Frequency

Area Boards will meet every two months

E. Quorum

The quorum for area boards is three, one member from each of the three constituent groups.

E. Lead Officer

The Lead Officer for an Area Board is the Area Housing Director.

Appendix 2

| A. Remit of area boards | Areas of duplication / other activity |
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| To contribute to the development, implementation and monitoring of the Capital programme in the area | Property committee - citywide remit, representation from the main board and the Tenants Investment Forum. |
| To monitor local performance against Your Homes Newcastle Delivery Plan targets | The main board receive this information. Performance posters are displayed in Community Housing Offices, updates are given at TARA's and local forums, ward committee's and through the new local agreements; however this is not consistent across the city. |
| To develop, implement and monitor local tenant participation compacts | This is done at a local level with individual groups that have developed neighbourhood agreements. Only 3 have been developed across the city. |
| To comment and make recommendations to the Area Housing Director on the proposed spend of any budgets delegated to an Area Level | Information on spend against Housing Project Fund budget is presented at area boards however area board members have no decision making power. Schemes are also discussed with Tenants and Residents Groups. Priority Investment Calculator has been developed to prioritise capital spend. |
| To actively liaise and engage with tenants in the area to identify local priorities and issues of concern, draw up action plans to address these, implement and monitor their delivery | NCC ward committee structure allows for residents to raise items of local concern. These meetings are attended by Housing Service Managers. The tenant's federation have city wide action on issues of common interest and concern through their working groups. |
| To work in partnership with local agencies in identifying and addressing issues of anti social behaviour | Other forums such as SNAPs, local residents groups and the local agreements will monitor ASB in local areas. |
| To monitor the local implementation of the Your Homes Newcastle Equality and Diversity policy and ensure that services reflect the diversity of community needs in the area | Board receive regular updates every 6 months with regards to equality and diversity. The Governance committee receive quarterly update about 'getting to know our customers'. Our Strategic Independent Advisory Group provides a 'critical friend' on diverse community needs in the local areas. |
| To work alongside the City Council's area and community planning structures, particularly in addressing | This is done through the Newcastle City Council's Ward Committee's and community development teams. |

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| <p>the regeneration of the City and the development of the Council's approach to neighbourhood management.</p> | |
| <p>To raise with the Main Board any issues of local concern and to facilitate communication between the Main Board and Area Boards</p> | <p>Areas of local concern have rarely been remitted to Board and tend to be addressed locally. Most reports from main board are reported for information not consultation.</p> |
| <p>To make to the Main Board and/or the Chief Executive any recommendations it considers appropriate to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ help improve the operation and performance of Your Homes Newcastle and the services provided by it ○ meet the aspirations and needs of its area. | <p>Committee's such as finance, governance and property, time limited committees', generic involvement, the tenant's federations groups may all lead to recommendations to the main board. Targeted consultation with specific groups is used to inform changes to in service delivery.</p> |

