



The Gateshead Housing Company Board of Directors

Thursday 8 July 2010 at 10am

To be held in the Board Room, Keelman House, Fifth Avenue
Business Park, Fifth Avenue, Team Valley Trading Estate,
Gateshead, Tyne and Wear

Agenda

Item	Business
1.	Apologies for Absence
2.	Declarations of Interest
	<u>ITEMS FOR DECISION</u>
3.	Minutes To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meetings of the Board held on (a) 12 May (Pages 3-16) and (b) 28 June 2010 (Pages 1-18)
4.	Matters Arising
5.	Risk Management Policy (Pages 19-30) Report of Director of Finance
6.	Complaints and Compliments Procedure Update (Pages 31-40) Report of Director of Finance
	<u>ITEMS FOR INFORMATION</u>
7.	Minutes of Resources and Audit Committee held on 20 May 2010 (Pages 41-48) Attached

Contact: Stuart Gibson Tel: (0191) 433 5308 Date: 1 July 2010

Item	
8.	Minutes of Asset Management Committee held on 25 June 2010 (Page 49-56) Attached
9.	Keep Britain Tidy - Cleaner Safer Greener Quality Mark (Pages 57-61) Report of Director of Housing Management
10.	Feedback from Outside Bodies and Events
11.	Items for Future Agendas
12.	Date and Time of Next Meeting The next meeting of the Board will be held on Thursday 23 September 2010 at 10am in the Board Room at Keelman House, Fifth Avenue Business Park, Fifth Avenue, Team Valley Trading Estate, Gateshead
13.	Exclusion of the Press and Public The Board may wish to exclude the press and public during consideration of the remaining business in accordance with the categories 1 and 4 of the company's Access to Information Rules.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

12 May 2010

PRESENT:

Directors

Barbara Dennis (Chair)
Richard Armitage
Robert Buckley
Allan Curry
Stan Dawson
Pauline Dillon
Kathryn Ferdinand
Paul Foy
John Hamilton
Peter Mole
Joachim Moussounda Mouanda
Bill Patterson
Sara Woolley

Advisers

Bill Fullen	Chief Executive
Jon Mallen-Beadle	Director of Finance
Neil Bouch	Director of Housing Management
Paul Proud	Acting Director of Property and Technical Services
Stuart Gibson	Company Administrator

Apologies for Absence

Val Hodge
Jim Willis

1 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

2 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting of the Board Meeting held on 17 March 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board considered arrangements for the company's sixth Annual General Meeting (AGM) and the process for the retirement of a Tenant and an Independent Director at that meeting.

The requirements for the company's AGM are governed largely by the provisions of the Companies Act 1985 and the company's Articles of Association. Article 4 requires the Council to nominate a representative to attend and act on its behalf at general meetings of the company, including the AGM. The Council has nominated Dave Bunce, Group Director, Community Based Services, for this purpose.

The Board agreed, at its meeting held on 12 May 2009, an amendment to its Articles of Association. Tenant and independent directors are entitled to hold office for a period of no more than 10 consecutive years or four consecutive terms of office, whichever is the lesser. The Articles require that the longest serving tenant and the longest serving independent directors shall retire from office at the AGM.

The AGM must be held in the calendar year 2010, not more than 15 months after the last AGM. The last AGM was held on 24 September 2009, therefore the next AGM must be held no later than 23 December 2010.

At the AGM, the Council Member will consider the company's annual accounts. If these accounts are not available in audited form, the AGM must still be held by the due date and then adjourned, to be reconvened when audited accounts are available.

Routine business at the AGM will be the annual report and accounts; re-election (if any) or election of directors and re-appointment of auditors and fixing their remuneration. Any other business will be special business, the purpose of which needs to be specified in the notice of the meeting to be given to the Council.

It is anticipated that the annual report of the directors of the company, together with the audited accounts, will be presented to the Board for approval on 8 July 2010. 21 clear days' notice of the AGM must be given to the Council, calling the AGM. Therefore, it would need to be held no earlier than 2 August 2010. It is proposed that the meeting be held immediately before or after the Board Meeting on 23 September 2010.

The longest serving tenant director shall retire from office at the AGM. In the event of more than one person becoming director on the same day, the tenant directors must agree amongst themselves the person to retire and notify the Company Secretary in writing and not less than 28 days before the AGM or failing such an agreement, to choose by lot.

Article 15(3) of the company's Articles of Association provide for direct or indirect elections to be held among Tenants.

The Board approved the appointment of Robert Buckley as a tenant director at its meeting held on 9 July 2009. The Board also approved the appointment of Gordon Spring as a reserve tenant director and that he be appointed to the Board should a vacancy arise before the AGM in 2010.

There are currently no vacancies on the Board for a tenant director and Gordon Spring remains as a reserve should a vacancy arise before the AGM.

The longest serving independent director shall retire from office at the AGM. In the event of more than one person becoming director on the same day, the independent directors must agree amongst themselves the person to retire and notify the Company Secretary in writing and not less than 28 days before the AGM or failing such an agreement, to choose by lot.

Whilst in previous years the Council has agreed that the retiring tenant and independent director may be reappointed, they have requested this year that an appropriate selection process is put in place.

The retiring tenant and independent director, if willing to stand for re-election, will automatically be selected as one of the candidates for interview. This process will be carried out in early September with a view to the successful candidates being selected prior to the AGM. It would also be appropriate for Gordon Spring as a reserve tenant director to be automatically selected for interview.

As there is currently no recognised Tenants Forum in Gateshead, the process will follow the same process carried out when Robert Buckley was appointed as a tenant director. The process will follow the company's standard recruitment process for independent directors.

The vacancies will be widely advertised and the applicants shortlisted and interviewed by an Interview Panel of three Board Members. The Panel will receive advice from the company's Chief Executive and/or Director of Finance.

In accordance with the Articles, the appointment of a tenant director is announced at Annual General Meeting and the Independent director appointment is endorsed by the Board.

- RESOLVED –
- (i) That the information be noted.
 - (ii) That the next Annual General Meeting be held immediately before or after the Board Meeting on 23 September 2010.
 - (iii) That the proposed arrangements for the retirement/appointment of a tenant and independent director be noted.

- (iv) That the same Interview Panel comprising of three Board Members for the appointment of a tenant and independent director be agreed.

4 BOARD APPRAISAL

The Chair of the Board carried out individual appraisals of Board Members during September, October and December 2009. The Chair of the Board is being appraised by a sub-group of Resources and Audit Committee at the conclusion of this meeting.

Given that last year's appraisal process was well received, it is proposed that the same process be followed for 2010 appraisals.

It is proposed that once again the Chair of the Board carry out an individual appraisal of each director and the appraisals be completed by end October 2010. The Company Administrator will liaise with the Chair to agree a schedule. It is proposed that the Chair's appraisal be carried out by a sub-group of Resources and Audit Committee.

It is proposed that the Chair of Board and Board Member annual performance review forms agreed by the Board on 9 July 2009 continue to be used for the 2010 appraisals.

The appraisals will be entirely confidential with only the information agreed in Section 2 of the performance review form being shared with the Company Administrator to address individual development needs and to develop the 2011 Board Training and Development Plan.

It is proposed that a Board Members workshop be held later in the year to consider the introduction of 360 degree appraisals in 2011.

With the exception of risk management, all the training and development identified in the 2009 plan were delivered. In addition, Board Members have attended a number of conferences during the last financial year.

During the course of the appraisals, Board Members identified areas of training and development. These have been addressed as part of an overall 2010 Training and Development Plan for the next year or have been addressed with Board Members separately. The proposed Plan was submitted.

Five of the existing Board successfully completed the Board Development Agency (BDA) Governance Qualification with other Board Members from Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) in 2008 and 2009. Three Board Members are currently undertaking the Advanced BDA Governance Qualification, again with Board Members from YHN.

RESOLVED – (i) That the outcome of the 2009 Board appraisals be noted.

- (ii) That the 2010 Board appraisal process be approved.
- (iii) That a Board Members workshop be held later in the year to consider the introduction of 360 degree appraisals in 2011.
- (iv) That the 2010 Training and Development Plan be approved.

5 DELIVERY PLAN 2010/11

The updated company delivery plan covering the period 2010/11 was submitted.

Whilst the Business Plan covers the period up to 2013, the management agreement specifies that an annual delivery plan must be submitted to the Council and cover outputs for the company, key performance requirements and standards and financial and staffing resources required to perform the agreed services. The plan will be available on the company's website.

- RESOLVED –
- (i) That the Delivery Plan 2010/11 be approved.
 - (ii) That a copy of the Delivery Plan 2010/11 be forwarded to the Council for its approval.
 - (iii) That any minor amendments to be made as a result of resolution (ii) above be delegated to the Chief Executive, following consultation with the Chair of the Board.

6 REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND FUTURE TARGETS 2010/11 – 2012/13

Each year the company is required to review the performance indicators that it reports and the performance targets which have been set. It is customary to review existing indicators and targets to ensure that they remain relevant, challenging and realistic.

The company is required to take into consideration any changes made by the Government to the reporting requirements and updated comparative information. Consideration can also be given to adding or deleting any indicators.

The company has undertaken a review of all of the indicators currently reported by the company and future targets have been set for the next three years.

All targets have been reviewed using S.M.A.R.T. methodology to ensure that the company improves its performance towards Audit Commission top quartile or HouseMark ALMO top quartile in the

shortest possible time, except where it is performing at top quartile already.

For indicators where no benchmark comparisons exist, the company has set its targets to show a steady continuous improvement within performance other than where it is confident that it has reached the optimal level of performance and in these cases performance targets are set to maintain existing performance.

Detailed proposals in relation to the retained performance indicators and the targets set were submitted.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the target indicators set for the 2010/11 to 2012/13 period be approved, subject to the rewording of the gas servicing definition as follows: -
- % of relevant properties that have had a gas service in the last 12 months.
- (ii) That the Chief Executive be authorised to make any amendments to the proposed indicators following consultation with the Council.

7 GOVERNANCE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND TARGETS

The Board agreed, at its meeting held on 17 March 2010, a Governance Improvement Plan. One of the actions within the succession planning area is to set targets for recruitment of Board Members from under-represented groups.

In addition, the Company Administrator has previously posted details of seven governance related performance indicators on the Board Members Website. 2009/10 was the baseline year and details of the performance together with proposed targets for the next three years were submitted.

- RESOLVED – That the Board Performance Indicators and targets for the next three years be approved, subject to the following indicator being deleted: -
- % of Board/Committee agendas and papers dispatched five clear working days of meeting.

8 RENT AND SERVICE CHARGE SETTING POLICY

The rent setting policy was approved by the Board at its meeting on 21 January 2010. Following this meeting, it was identified that the policy did not include service charges which may be chargeable on some of the properties owned by the company. Therefore, the rent setting policy was updated to include the setting of service charges so that the information was available in one document.

A number of changes have been made to the rent setting policy to ensure that it incorporates the service charges. The updated policy was submitted.

The rent and service charge setting policy has been used to set the rents attached to the properties within St Cuthberts. Rents have been calculated by using the formula within the policy. These rents have been calculated for 2010/11, details of which were reported.

The Rent and Service Charge Setting Policy has financial implications in relation to the income to be received by the company. The rents will be set initially at a level that will ensure the company can cover the amount provided from reserves and also to ensure that these are not substantially higher than current rents paid for similar properties in the Gateshead area.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the updates to the Rent and Service Charge Setting Policy be approved.
- (ii) That the rents set for St Cuthberts for 2010/11 be approved.

9 FINANCIAL INCLUSION AND WORKLESSNESS STRATEGY 2010-12

The Board considered a Financial Inclusion and Worklessness Strategy for the period 2010/11 -2011/12.

The strategy sets out a number of priorities for both financial inclusion and worklessness.

The company's objective through this strategy is to enable residents to be better able to manage their money on a day-to-day basis, plan for the future and cope with financial pressure and to deal more effectively with unexpected financial distress. To achieve this, the company will look to develop tailored responses, in partnership with other specialist agencies, against the following key themes: -

- Building financial capability
- Ensuring resident access to high quality benefit and debt advice
- Stabilising and maximising residents' income
- Improving access to appropriate financial services.

To tackle worklessness, the key objective is to enable residents to be better able to access and sustain employment. This strategy recognises that, as a company, it needs to look at what additional activity is needed to help residents rather than duplicating successful local services that already exist across Gateshead. Activity will focus on the following themes: -

- Enhancing residents' skills and extending access to training opportunities.
- Support and assistance.
- Post employment support.
- Improving resident service.
- Caring and child care responsibilities.

Working in partnership with others maximises the company's ability to make a difference in tackling both worklessness and financial exclusion. It is strengthening and forming new partnerships and referral mechanisms with a wide range of agencies with specialist expertise to address the multiple barriers faced by many residents across Gateshead.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the Company Financial Inclusion and Worklessness Strategy for the period 2010/11 -2011/12 be approved.
- (ii) That half-yearly progress reports showing outcomes for residents be presented to Customers and Communities Committee for information.

10 HRA REFORM: COUNCIL HOUSING A REAL FUTURE

The Board was informed of the release of the prospectus and consultation document around the proposed reform of Council Housing Finance.

The joint CLG/HMT Review of Council Housing Finance was announced in December 2007 and launched in March 2008.

CLG published its voluntary 'offer' to local authority landlords on 25 March 2010. The offer is in the form of a prospectus setting out the terms on which the government plans to implement the dismantling of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) subsidy system and introduce a system of self-financing from April 2011, on a voluntary basis.

At present, the company is working with the Council and CIH (the company's joint external advisers), looking at exactly what the proposal will mean for Gateshead.

It is anticipated that the company will be in a position to hold a seminar in mid to late June to update Directors on the consequences for Gateshead and give Directors the opportunity to feedback into the response to the six questions asked within the document.

The deadline for comments to the consultation is 6 July 2010.

- RESOLVED – That the information be noted and a one off seminar be arranged in late June 2010 to discuss exactly what the offer means to Gateshead.

11 CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

The minutes of the meeting of Customers and Communities Committee held on 21 April 2010 were submitted.

RESOLVED – That the minutes be noted.

12 RE-PROFILING OF CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Board approved, at its meeting held on 17 March 2010, the acceleration of the Decent Homes improvement work allocated to Morrison Facility Services (MFS).

MFS has confirmed that they have the capacity to self deliver the accelerated programme and have begun re-profiling their delivery programme. This will mean that their programme will now finish at the end of this current financial year. All of the Decent Homes surveys for the remaining MFS schemes have now been completed and are currently being verified before they are handed over.

The adjustments to the programme will mean 507 tenants will receive improvement work up to 12 months earlier than originally programmed. The adjustment will also enable the company to make a further £1 million of savings due to the reduction in MFS fixed preliminary costs.

The adjustment to the programme means that Gateshead Council's Local Environmental Services will be the sole capital investment partner in 2011/12, delivering works to the Inner West and East Neighbourhoods.

The re-profiled programme was submitted.

- RESOLVED –
- (i) That the re-profiled capital programme be noted.
 - (ii) That a special meeting of the Board be held as soon as possible to discuss the key issues and enable Directors to respond to any queries about the capital programme accordingly.
 - (iii) That the company explore other ways of getting messages out to tenants about the remainder of the capital programme.

13 TENANT SERVICES AUTHORITY – THE FINALISED REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The Board was informed of the Tenant Services Authority's (TSA) new regulatory framework for social housing that came into force

on 1 April 2010 and of arrangements for the inspection of registered providers in the period April to October 2010.

The new regulatory regime is built around the concept of co-regulation, where providers carry out rigorous and honest self-assessment, subject to a 'backbone' of regulation by the TSA. Boards will have a new responsibility to self-regulate and to drive improvement. They will need to ensure their organisation meets the TSA's six national standards and they will be expected to involve tenants in drawing up 'local offers' (previously referred to as 'local standards') which reflect local priorities and needs. Tenants will have a key role in scrutinising performance.

Although the final framework remains broadly in line with the draft standards issued in November 2009, there are a number of areas where the TSA has adapted its approach. Details of these were reported.

In April 2010, the TSA and Audit Commission issued a joint statement setting out the arrangements for inspection of registered providers in the period April to October 2010. During that period of time, both organisations will complete a joint review of inspection arrangements including publishing a joint consultation document on the longer-term inspection methodology in May 2010. Consultation will last for three months with any new arrangements coming into effect from October 2010.

The joint statement provides the operational context for the commissioning and undertaking of inspections during the six-month interim period until the new arrangements are implemented. The Audit Commission will carry out inspections on behalf of the TSA.

Details of how the TSA will commission inspection, how the Audit Commission will undertake inspection and how the results of inspection will be used were reported.

The finalised framework includes the six standards set out in the draft proposals:

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
- Home
- Tenancy
- Neighbourhood and Community
- Value for Money, and
- Governance and Viability.

There have been some changes in the wording to make them more concise and coherent and the TSA has also made its required outcomes clearer where necessary. Each standard is complemented by a list of specific expectations for providers.

Overall, however, the broad thrust of the standards and the expected outcomes remain the same as they were when the draft standards were published for consultation. The six standards are outcome-based so providers are free to choose how they deliver their services as long as they provide the required end result for tenants. There is room for innovation as long as tenants are satisfied and their interests are not at risk. Providers will need to demonstrate that they understand and are responding to the particular needs of their tenants.

The enforceability of the regime looks set to rest on how providers set out in their annual report their commitments and how they deliver against them. Providers will also have to ensure they are up to speed with best practice and performance so that their performance does not fall behind. However, there are still question marks about how performance will be compared and poor performers identified.

The TSA expects all stakeholders to rise to the challenge especially around the evolution of co-regulatory ways of working and of earning tenants' trust where they may be initially sceptical.

Providers are expected to produce their report to tenants by October each year showing how they are meeting their standards, including their local offers. Although the TSA says it doesn't want to be prescriptive over format, providers will have to work quickly to ensure they can provide a workable and useful document which will be crucial in making co-regulation work.

The TSA insists it is keen to provide as much certainty as it can but says its approach to regulating will 'inevitably develop' as the new framework begins to take effect. There will be further work in a number of areas: -

- A joint review of inspection with the Audit Commission. Consultation is expected to be published in May 2010.
- New methodology on how the TSA will identify those providers most at risk of failing to meet its standards, due to be published before the end of June 2010.
- Exploring ways in which a fee-charging system might be implemented.
- Working with a number of organisations including the Ombudsman services and tenants' bodies to support tenants in making complaints.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

14 PERFORMANCE – YEAR-END 2009/10

The Board was informed of the 2009/10 year-end performance results.

At the end of 2008/09 there were 31 performance indicators, of which 23 were traffic lighted green, two were traffic lighted amber, four were red and two were not yet measurable.

The company currently has 33 performance indicators which it monitors and report to Board on a quarterly basis which track performance in a number of key areas. Compared to targets for the year, performance has improved in a number of these key areas.

At the end of 2009/10, performance shows that: -

- 23 indicators were traffic lighted green. This shows that the company has achieved or improved upon the annual targets set for these indicators.
- One indicator was traffic lighted amber. This shows that the company has not met the target set although performance has improved compared to the year-end result in 2008/09.
- Two indicators were traffic lighted red. This shows that the company has not met the target set and performance has fallen compared to the year-end result in 2008/09.
- Seven indicators were classed as not yet measurable/baseline year. Of these, five indicators were new indicators in 2009/10 and therefore, the result cannot be compared to any targets set or prior year results. Two indicators are not yet measurable as it relates to the status survey which is not carried out until 2010/11.

The analysis therefore indicates that performance relating to 22 out of the 26 measurable performance indicators can be traffic lighted as on target or improving.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the 2009/10 year-end performance results be noted.
- (ii) That employees be congratulated on improving performance in a number of key areas.

15 CORPORATE HEALTH PERFORMANCE – YEAR-END 2009/10

The Board was informed of the 2009/10 Year-End Corporate Health performance results.

In 2008/09, there were 12 Corporate Health indicators and of these, nine were traffic lighted green, one was traffic lighted amber, one red and one was not yet measurable.

The company has 20 Corporate Health indicators which it monitors and report to Board on a quarterly basis. At the end of the year: -

- Nine indicators were traffic lighted green. This shows that the company has achieved or improved upon the annual targets set for these indicators.
- Two indicators were traffic lighted amber. This shows that the company has not met the target set although

performance has improved compared to the year end result in 2008/09.

- Three indicators were traffic lighted red. This shows that the company has not met the target set and performance has fallen compared to the year end result in 2008/09.
- Six indicators were classed as not yet measurable/baseline year. Of these, five indicators were new indicators in 2009/10 and therefore, the result cannot be compared to any targets set or prior year results. One indicator is not yet measurable as it relates to a status survey which is not carried out until 2010/11.

Therefore, of the indicators which are measurable, 11 out of 14 indicators had achieved performance or the performance had improved on prior year results.

RESOLVED – That the 2009/10 year-end corporate health performance results be noted.

16 THE CENTRE FOR HOUSING AND SUPPORT ACCREDITATION

The Board was informed of the successful achievement of the Centre for Housing and Support (CHS) Code of Practice accreditation for Older Persons Services.

The accreditation is valid for three years and will be reviewed in 2013 for reaccreditation. A framed certificate and plaque will be erected in each of the schemes and the outcomes will be publicised in Here and Now in May 2010.

The company in partnership with Gateshead Council is the first organisation in the North East of England to achieve the CHS Code of Practice.

Details of the key areas of strength highlighted in the report were reported.

As well as achieving the accreditation, several areas of good practice were identified. Two areas for improvement were also identified.

The cost of the assessment including the development of the scheme portfolios was £4,500, of which the Council contributed 50%.

RESOLVED – That the successful achievement of the Centre for Housing and Support (CHS) Code of Practice accreditation for Older Persons Services be noted.

17 PETITIONS UPDATE

The Board received an update on progress with petitions received since the protocol for the handling of petitions was agreed.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

18 OUTSTANDING ISSUES

The Board was informed of outstanding issues it has requested a further report on.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

19 ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

RESOLVED – That a report be submitted to the Board clarifying the responsibilities of The Gateshead Housing Company and Keelman Homes Boards.

20 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next Board Meeting will be held on Thursday 8 July 2010 at 10am in the Board Room, Keelman House, Fifth Avenue Business Park, Fifth Avenue, Team Valley Trading Estate, Gateshead

21 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the remaining business in accordance with the indicated categories of the company's Access to Information Rules.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

28 June 2010

PRESENT:

Directors

Barbara Dennis (Chair)
Robert Buckley
Allan Curry
Kathryn Ferdinand
Peter Mole
Bill Patterson
Jim Willis

Advisers

Bill Fullen	Chief Executive
Jon Mallen-Beadle	Director of Finance
Neil Bouch	Director of Housing Management
Stuart Gibson	Company Administrator

Apologies for Absence

Richard Armitage
Stan Dawson
John Hamilton
Val Hodge
Sara Woolley

25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

26 IMPLICATIONS OF THE HRA REFORM PROSPECTUS

The Board received a presentation on the implications of the HRA Reform Prospectus. In particular, assumptions around remaining within the HRA, the self financing national perspective, assumptions around self financing, the self financing Gateshead perspective, other considerations and the company's draft response to the six consultation questions were highlighted.

The presentation concluded that the self financing business plan on the basis of the current proposal is better funded than the plan based on an unreformed subsidy system.

CLG requires responses to the consultation by 6 July 2010.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the presentation be noted.
- (ii) That the draft response to the six consultation questions be sent to all members of the Board for any comments prior to its submission to CLG by 6 July 2010.

27 DECENT HOMES PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Board received a presentation on the Decent Homes programme. In particular, the Decent Homes Standard, the Gateshead Standard, progress to date, the cost of the programme and the future were highlighted.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the presentation be noted.
- (ii) That an article be issued from the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Board publicising the progress made to date.



Report to the Board

8 July 2010

Title: Risk Management Policy

Report of: Director of Finance

Purpose of report

1. To approve an updated Risk Management Policy.

Background

2. The Resources and Audit Committee was informed, at its meeting held on 9 March 2010, of the appointment of Price Waterhouse Coopers to carry out a review of risk management.
3. The Resources and Audit Committee agreed, at its meeting held on 20 May 2010, an action plan following the review. This included a review of the current Risk Management Policy.

Risk Management Policy

4. The risk management review highlighted that the current Risk Management Policy was inherited from the Council and has not been updated. It provides a high level of coverage of the concepts of risk management but is insufficiently detailed in the following areas: -
 - Principles of good risk management
 - Risk scoring
 - Strategic and operational risks
 - Identification of new risks
 - Risk management, monitoring and escalation procedures.
5. There is uncertainty by staff about how it should be followed and a lack of risk management knowledge within the company to implement it.
6. The format of the risk registers for strategic and operational risks is different. This causes confusion within the company and also hinders the process of moving risks between the strategic and operational risk register.

7. The operational risk register captures gross and net risk ratings and uses traffic lights for the risk scoring whereas the strategic register scores only net risk and does not use a colour coded assessment.
8. The risk registers do not link to the performance management process or the strategic or operational objectives of the company. The risk registers are standalone documents, particularly within operational teams.
9. The strategic risks are assessed by likelihood and impact. There is no numeric scale to assess these and terms such as high/medium and low used. There are no definitions as to what would be classified as high, medium or low therefore the approach to assessing the risks is not consistent.
10. The scoring process for risks has been revised for both the strategic and operational risk register so that a consistent mechanism is used.
11. An updated Risk Management Policy is attached at the Appendix to this report.
12. A four scale matrix has been used for impact and likelihood and the risk policy provides a clear definition and examples of what each of point of scale represents.
13. Full implementation of the policy will be conducted and roles are clear from the risk policy.

Link to Values

14. This report links to the following company values: -
 - Being a listening and learning organisation
 - Being motivated, trained and committed across the company
 - A commitment to all our employees
 - Being customer focused, innovative and professional.

Risk Management Implications

15. The risk management implications are addressed throughout the report and in the Risk Management Policy.

Financial Implications

16. There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

17. There are no equality and diversity implications directly arising from this report.

Health Implications

18. There are no health implications arising from this report.

Environmental Implications

19. There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

Value for Money Implications

20. A robust risk management process that is embedded throughout the company will provide value for money.

Consultation carried out

21. Meetings have been held with lead officers in Corporate Services, Housing Management and Property and Technical Services to inform the risk management review.

Impact on Customers

22. An effective risk management process will maintain the delivery of services to customers.

Recommendation

23. The Board is recommended to approve the updated Risk Management Policy.



The Gateshead Housing Company
Working with Gateshead Council

RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY

RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY STATEMENT

The Gateshead Housing Company will adopt the principles of risk management to protect the health, safety and welfare of its employees and the people it serves, to protect its property, assets and other resources and to maintain its reputation and good standing in the wider community.

The company provides a wide range of housing management services to the tenants and leaseholders of Gateshead Council, all of which give rise to some level of risk. We are fully committed to regularly identifying and assessing these risks and taking appropriate action to prevent, or minimise their impact on service delivery. In this way the Company will better achieve its corporate objectives and enhance the value of the services it provides to the community.

The company's risk management strategy objectives are to:

- Integrate risk management into the culture of the company.
- Manage risk in accordance with best practice.
- Anticipate and respond to changing social, environmental, economic and legislative risks – including opportunities as well as threats.
- Prevent injury, damage and losses and reduce the cost of risk.
- Raise awareness of the need for risk management by all those connected with the delivery of services.
- Support sustainable improvements in service and the achievement of best value.

These objectives will be achieved by:

- Establishing clear roles, responsibilities and reporting lines within the company for risk management.
- Providing opportunities for shared learning on risk management across the Company.
- Offering a framework for allocating resources to identified priority risk areas.
- Reinforcing the importance of effective risk management as part of the everyday work of employees through training.
- Monitoring risk management arrangements and seeking opportunities through effective risk management, on an ongoing basis.

RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY

General

1. This Policy provides the framework within which the company will manage the strategic and operational risks associated with the provision of its wide range of services.
2. Risk management, performed rigorously and comprehensively, both creates stability, contributes to the achievement of the company's strategic objectives and enhances the value of the services it provides to the community.

Definition

3. The Audit Commission's paper "Worth the risk" defines risk as the following: -

"The threat that an event or action will adversely affect an organisation's ability to achieve its objectives and to successfully execute its strategies. Risk management is the process by which risks are identified, evaluated and controlled. It is a key element of the framework of governance together with community focus; structures and processes, standards of conduct and service delivery arrangements."

When does Risk Management apply?

5. Risk management will apply throughout the company's operations and strategic objectives, the following situations are examples of where risk management is essential: -
 - Making corporate, strategic and service planning arrangements.
 - Priority setting.
 - Developing policies and supporting strategies.
 - Planning service delivery and operational activities.
 - Considering new legislation.
 - Project planning and managing.
 - Procuring or undertaking options appraisals.
 - Partnership and joint working arrangements.
 - Performance management framework.

Benefits of Risk Management

6. There are a number of benefits which can be gained through an effective and robust risk management process: -
 - Enabling future activity to take place in a consistent and controlled manner.
 - Improving decision making, planning and prioritisation by the use of a comprehensive and structured understanding of business activity, volatility and project opportunity/threat.
 - Contributing to more efficient use of capital and resources within the organisation.
 - Reducing volatility in the non-essential areas of the business.
 - Protecting and enhancing assets and company image.
 - Developing and supporting people and the organisation's knowledge base.

- Optimising operational efficiency.

Risk types

7. Strategic risks - those which are critical to the direction of an organisation. Strategic risks may be driven by government policy, competition or a change in stakeholder requirements. Strategic risks will be owned by Corporate Management Team and the Board.
8. Operational risks - those which are encountered during the day to day running of the Company. Operational risks are owned by a member of Senior Management Team.
9. Project risk will also be identified and managed through the project management process. Every project is required to have a project risk register.

Risk Registers

10. A strategic risk register should be maintained by Corporate Management Team and the Board.
11. An operational risk register should be held for the following three directorates within the Company:
 - Corporate Services.
 - Housing Management.
 - Property and Technical Services.
12. The strategic and operational risk registers should link to the company's objectives and performance management framework.
13. An example of the template risk register which should be used for both strategic and operational risks is shown at the Appendix.

Risk Appetite

14. The Board's role is to determine the company's appetite for risk. This should be reviewed annually.

Risk Scoring

15. The risks are prioritised based on likelihood and impact using a traffic light system.
16. Both strategic and operational risks will be scored using a traffic light system based on likelihood and impact. Given that strategic risks are critical to the future operation of the business, the impact will be significantly higher for these risks. The likelihood is the same for both types of risks.

Likelihood – Strategic and Operational Risks

Scoring	Definition	Timing of occurrence
4	Almost certain	Less than 3 months
3	Likely	3 – 6 months
2	Moderate	6 – 12 months
1	Unlikely	In excess of 12 months

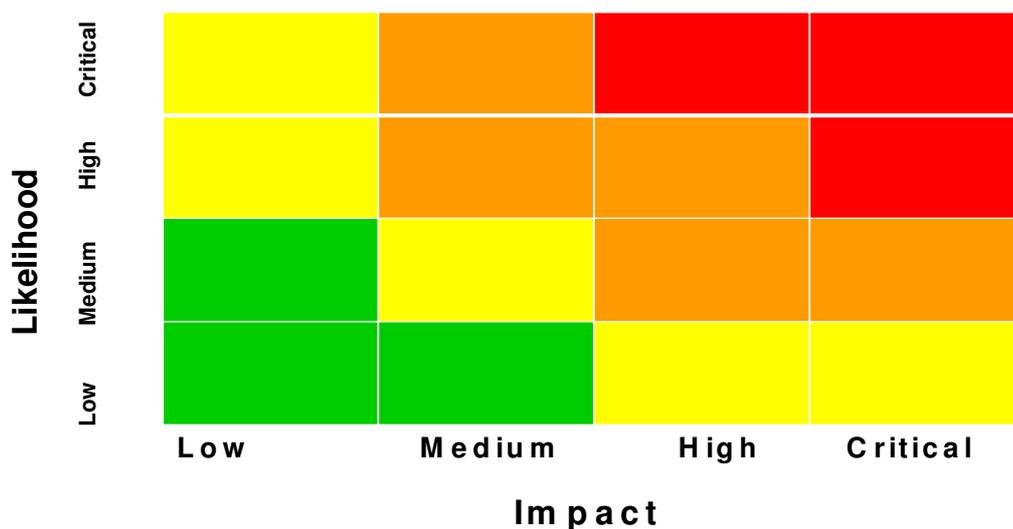
Impact – Strategic Risks

Scoring	Definition	Example of impact
4	Critical	Total service loss for significant period Fatality Financial loss over £500,000 Government / Council intervention
3	High	Significant service disruption Major/disabling injury Financial loss over £100,000 Adverse national media coverage
2	Medium	Service disruption Loss time injury Financial loss over £50,000 Adverse local media coverage / lots of service user complaints
1	Low	Minor service disruption / short term inconvenience Minor injury Financial loss under £50,000 Isolated service user complaints

Impact – Operational Risks

Scoring	Definition	Example of impact
4	Critical	Total service loss for significant period Fatality Financial loss over £200,000 Government / Council intervention
3	High	Significant service disruption Major/disabling injury Financial loss over £50,000 Adverse national media coverage
2	Medium	Service disruption Loss time injury Financial loss over £25,000 Adverse local media coverage / lots of service user complaints
1	Low	Minor service disruption / short term inconvenience Minor injury Financial loss under £25,000 Isolated service user complaints

17. The following four scale matrix demonstrates how the risks will be assessed using a traffic light system: -



Risk Identification

18. It is the responsibility of the Board and every risk owner within the company to identify emerging risks. Risk management should be integrated into the culture of the company. The next section identifies how this process will be managed and monitored.

Monitoring of Risks

The Board

19. The strategic risk register will be reviewed by the Board three times each year.
20. The Board will have an annual planning session to undertake a full review of the strategic risks to identify any emerging risks and to update the current risks proposed.

Resources and Audit Committee

21. The Resources and Audit Committee will scrutinise an operational risk register for a directorate at each meeting as well as any critical / high risks that require attention. It will recommend to the Board any risks to be escalated to the strategic register.
22. The Resources and Audit Committee will annually scrutinise the strategic risk register.
23. The roles of the Board and the Resources and Audit Committee are outlined in their terms of reference.

Corporate Management Team

24. The Corporate Management Team is responsible for overseeing the strategic direction of the company and will review the strategic risk register bi-monthly with particular attention to the 'red' risks. It will also periodically review the operational risk registers and recommend to the Board any risks that should be escalated to the strategic register. Risk ownership of strategic risks will lie with Corporate Management Team.

Senior Management Team

25. The Senior Management Team is responsible for overseeing the operational activities within the company. It will represent the company's Risk Management Working Group and review the operational risk registers every six weeks. This group will recommend to the Corporate Management Team any risks that should be escalated to the strategic register.

Risk Owners

26. Risk owners will be responsible for updating their risk register every six weeks and identifying any new risks. Risk owners will be required to report on progress.

Risk Manager

27. For the purposes of this policy, the Risk Manager is the Company Administrator. The Risk Manager will review all risks at an operational level. The review will include but not be limited to: -
- A gap analysis of the organisations functional risks which are not covered by any of the risk registers.
 - Proposition of any 'red' rated operational risks to the strategic register.
 - Challenge to the officers to ensure that scoring is accurate and consistent and that prioritisation is appropriate.
 - To ensure that mitigating actions which were proposed have been undertaken or that appropriate revised timescales have been provided.
28. The Risk Manager is responsible for implementation of this Policy and will be the lead officer for the Risk Management Working Group.
29. The Risk Manager will present the risk registers to the Board, Resources and Audit Committee, Corporate Management Team, Senior Management Team and Risk Management Working Group in accordance with the timescales outlined above.

How to Treat a Risk

30. There are potentially four ways that a risk should be treated: -
- Tolerate – Done enough; cannot do any more; monitor risk closely.
 - Transfer – Try to move the risk to another organisation, for example outsourcing; insure against risk.
 - Terminate – Stop doing the activity.
 - Treat – Put in place additional controls and monitoring arrangements.
31. These decisions will be taken at the appropriate level of the governance structure depending on the severity of the risk.

Training

32. Those involved with the risk management process will receive appropriate training and periodic refresher training.

Internal Audit

33. Periodically, risks will be reviewed and tested by internal audit. Any changes or discrepancies noted will be updated on the relevant risk register by the Risk Manager.

Responsibility

34. The responsibility for the implementation of the Policy is as follows:-
- The Director of Finance, in consultation with the Chief Executive is responsible for advising the Company on risk management arrangements (Financial Regulation 12.1).
 - The Director of Finance will make the necessary arrangements to facilitate the implementation, monitoring and auditing of the company's Corporate Risk Management Policy.
 - Corporate Management Team will be responsible for identifying emerging risks, assessing significant risks arising from their service activities and for escalating risks to the strategic risk register.
 - All risk owners have a responsibility to implement and monitor adherence to the policy in the everyday activities of their specific service areas.
 - The Risk Manager will be responsible for implementing the Corporate Risk Management Policy, reviewing all risks at an operational level and leading the Risk Management Working Group.

Evidence of Compliance

35. Compliance will be evidenced by: -
- The existence and implementation of a Risk Management Policy.
 - Related policy statements and documented procedures.
 - Strategic and operational risk registers for all of the Company's activities.
 - Minutes from Board, Resources and Audit Committee, Corporate Management Team, Senior Management Team and Risk Management Working Group.
 - Internal audit reports.

Communication

36. The Policy will be published on the Company's Internet, Intranet and the Board Members website.

Review of Policy

37. The Policy will be reviewed and updated periodically by the Board.



Title: Complaints and Compliments Policy & Procedure Update

Report of: Director of Finance

Purpose of Report

1. To seek approval for proposed changes to the Complaints and Compliments Policy and Procedure.

Background

2. A report was submitted to the Board on 25 September 2008 outlining the need for us to ensure that challenging timescales were adopted in order for us to respond to complaints as quickly as possible. We consulted customers and compared our performance with other ALMOs and it was clear that a timescale of 10 days was perceived as good practice (compared to our existing policy of 20 days).
3. The proposed changes being made to our current Complaints and Compliments Policy are in line with the Tenant Service Authority's National Standard regarding 'tenant involvement and empowerment' which requires us to consult on customer service, choice and complaints.
4. These changes form part of our service standards that we have publicised within the 'Guide to Your Services.' This forms part of our local offer in response to the TSA's service standards.
5. It was agreed that we would start to meet the 10 day timescale internally at first to give employees a chance to embed the change before we launched this and told our customers via the website.
6. For the period April 2009 – April 2010, 557 step two complaints have been received, with 86% of these being resolved within the 10 day target, with an average response time of 7.92 days. For the same period the previous year, April 2008 – April 2009, 480 step two complaints had been received, with 58 % of these being resolved within the 20 day target.
7. We now feel that we are ready to formally update the policy and have amended the policy and procedure to reflect this so that we can inform customers via an amended Complaints and Compliments leaflet and on the website of the change to 10 days. In addition to this, we have updated a couple of other areas of the

policy and procedure to ensure that we continue to improve the process. The updated policy is attached as an Appendix to this report.

Compliments

8. Currently there is not a process recorded in the Complaint and Compliments procedure for compliments and it is proposed to add the following paragraph:-

Compliments are recorded onto the Corporate Complaints & Compliments System.

All compliments must be logged and passed to the appropriate employee's Line Manager. An acknowledgement letter is sent to the customer by the employee's Line Manager.

9. Any potential service improvements will be logged on the system and performance will be shared with customers via the Newspaper and the Intranet.

Learning from Complaints

10. The Tenant Service Authority are looking for transparency and effective scrutiny with an element of independent validation as part of their new co-regulatory framework.
11. This includes Registered Providers setting out their service offers and reporting performance to tenants. We need to ensure tenants are involved in scrutinising of our performance on service standards.
12. Initially, we are proposing to have an independent panel of tenants who will be trained to identify trends and improvement initiatives and to look at learning from Complaints and Compliments. We will then look to review this process after the first year of operation.
13. We will develop this panel from representatives from the Service Improvement Groups. In addition to this, we will publicise the role of the new panel and look to recruit other interested tenants and leaseholders.
14. We will share our performance in responding to complaints and the learning from the complaints we receive with our customers via the newspaper and the internet. We will also share the improvements that we have put in place in response to the learning undertaken.

Link to values

15. This report is in line with the following values of the company: -
- Being a listening and learning organisation
 - Being honest, accountable and transparent
 - Being motivated, trained and committed
 - Being customer focused, innovative and professional
 - Being caring and respecting
 - Embracing equality
 - A commitment to all our employees

Impact on tenants

16. The complaint and compliment procedure has been produced in consultation with tenants. The response time for complaints will be reduced and customers will be more involved in the process of dealing with their complaints. Customer contacts will be systematically recorded efficiently and effectively having a real impact on improving services to customers. Customers will be informed, via company publications, on how we have performed in relation to complaints and what service improvements have been made.

Risk Management Implications

17. Failure to sustain service improvements has been identified as a strategic risk of the company. The implementation of these changes to the Complaints and Compliments Procedure will reduce this risk.

Financial Implications

18. There are minimal financial implications arising from this change to the procedure. Some staff and tenant training will be required and new customer complaint leaflets produced. The estimated cost for training is £1500 and provision has been included in the budget. The cost of producing new leaflets has also been included in the Communications budget.

Equality and Diversity Implications

19. A new system is being developed that will utilise Northgate Front Office. The new system will use the tenant information already held to interrogate any equality and diversity issues from complaints and compliments.

Value for Money Implications

20. The Complaints and Compliments Policy supports our aim to achieve value for money in all we do by ensuring best use of customer feedback and staff resources.

Health Implications

21. There are no direct health implications arising from this report although the successful implementation of the recommendations would have a positive impact on the health and well being of Gateshead residents.

Environmental Implications

22. There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

Consultation carried out

23. Senior Management Team were consulted on the changes to this procedure. The Customer Service SIG have previously supported the move from 20 to 10 working days for dealing with Stage 2 complaints.

Recommendation

24. The Board is recommended to approve changes to the Complaints and Compliments Policy and Procedure and for a copy to be forwarded to the Council for information.

Contact: Sam Devlin, Customer Service Development Manager Tel No: 0191 433 8966



The Gateshead Housing Company

Working with Gateshead Council

COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS PROCEDURE

Introduction

We welcome complaints and compliments from our customers. We realise that things can occasionally go wrong and people may not be happy with the service they have received.

Complaints are valuable as they:

- give customers the opportunity to provide feedback on services;
- give us the opportunity to put things right where mistakes have been made;
- allow us to improve our services and make sure mistakes are not repeated.

What is a Complaint?

A complaint is when someone is unhappy about standards of service, actions or lack of action by The Gateshead Housing Company or a person or body acting on its behalf. A customer may express dissatisfaction because:

- we have failed to provide a service
- the standards of the service were not acceptable
- we provided the service in an unfair or discriminatory manner.

What is not covered by the Complaints procedure?

Some complaints are excluded from the complaints procedure including those:

- in areas where other statutory procedures, rights of appeal or legal remedies already exist
- from Councillors unless they are acting on behalf of a member of the public or outside organisation
- about employment matters from members of staff
- about Board of Management. Complaints of this nature will be dealt with by the relevant code of conduct and governance procedures of The Gateshead Housing Company
- about financial impropriety that should be referred to the Director of Finance or Chief Executive as appropriate
- that refers to matters over a year old unless the complainant has good reasons why they did not come forward sooner.

Publicising the Complaints and Compliments System

We know that people will not use the complaints procedure if they do not know it exists, so we will publicise it widely by:

- displaying posters in housing offices
- producing leaflets that include a complaint form
- providing the information in several languages and in Braille, on tape or CD-Rom and in large print
- working in partnership with local organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, charity and voluntary groups
- putting information in The Gateshead Housing Company newsletter
- putting information on The Gateshead Housing Company website including an on-line complaints form

Making a complaint

Complaints can be made:

- in person at a housing office
- by telephone
- by fax
- by e-mail
- by a complaints form which will be available at any housing office and on our website
- by letter
- through a councillor
- with the assistance of other organisations including:
 - Citizens Advice Bureau
 - Service user groups such as tenants associations
 - Voluntary and charitable organisations
 - Council staff
- with the use of facilities and information provided for people including:
 - People with disabilities
 - People with reading difficulties
 - People whose first language is not English
 - People with impaired sight or hearing.

How our complaints procedure works

A complaint can be resolved at anytime during the following three stages.

Stage 1 – Problem Solving

When a complaint is made, we will try to deal with the complaint quickly and informally by providing information or taking appropriate action to the satisfaction of the customer. Informal resolution of complaints in this manner **will be** recorded on the complaints system. ~~but may be recorded in the service area's information systems.~~

Stage 2 – Investigation of the Complaint

If the complaint cannot be resolved immediately, the complainant will receive a letter within three working days from receipt of the complaint. This will tell them:

- what will be done in response to their complaint
- that their complaint will be dealt within ~~20~~ **10** working days, and if this is not possible, why not and a date when a full response will be available
- who to contact about the complaint

The Investigating Officer will telephone the complainant to confirm the facts and find out what the customer wants us to do to resolve the issue. The Investigating Officer will also keep in contact with the customer during the investigation to keep them up to date with progress.

Following the investigation, the complainant will receive the results in writing from a senior manager. If they are still unhappy, they can request a review of their complaint by the Chief Executive. This must be done within 10 working days of receiving the results.

Stage 3 - Review of the Complaint

If a complainant is still dissatisfied after stage two, the complaint will be referred to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive will review both the handling and outcome of the complaint and provide a full response to the complainant within 20 working days. However, with the agreement of the complainant, this time period may be extended because of the complexity of the complaint.

When we have finished considering a complaint we will tell complainants how they can pursue their complaint with the Local Government Ombudsman.

The Local Government Ombudsman

This is an independent service set up by the Government to investigate complaints about councils.

As Gateshead Council remains the landlord complaints that involve the Local Government Ombudsman will be dealt with in accordance with a joint protocol between the Gateshead Housing Company and Gateshead Council.

A complainant can refer their complaint at any time during the course of an investigation to the Local Government Ombudsman. However, it is usually expected that the complainant will exhaust the procedure before involving the Ombudsman.

We will fully co-operate with the Ombudsman's investigation and consider any remedies proposed. The Ombudsman will decide whether or not we have acted unfairly or if a complainant has suffered an injustice as a result of maladministration.

A report on the Ombudsman's findings will be sent to Gateshead Council.

Learning from Complaints – Independent Tenant Panel

An independent panel of tenants will be trained to look at complaints and compliments received by the Company to see what we have learnt from what our customers are telling us.

Remedies

The complaints system is there to put things right where they have gone wrong, in short to provide a remedy. If a complaint is found to be justified our aim is to find an appropriate remedy that is satisfactory to the complainant.

When a complaint is made the complainant will be asked what they want in order to resolve the matter. This could involve one or more of the following;

- an apology
- an explanation of what happened
- an assurance that the same thing will not happen again
- the complainant gets the service he/she wants
- details of any other remedial action that provides a reasonable response to the complaint
- details of any changes to practices and procedures resulting from the complaint.

Where a complaint has been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman the company will recommend to the council any proposed remedies for consideration.

Management of the Procedure

The information and statistics about complaints are collated centrally and reported to ~~the Board of Management~~ Resources and Audit Committee.

We will:

- have a nominated officer to oversee the handling of complaints
- make sure that employees who investigate complaints are properly trained and have all the necessary skills
- record complaints properly
- periodically review complaints, the causes and the changes to service provision arising from complaints
- identify trends in respect of complaints

Compliments

What is a compliment?

A compliment is an expression of a customer's expectations being exceeded.

Making a compliment

- Compliments are recorded onto the Corporate Complaints & Compliments System.
- All compliments must be logged and passed to the appropriate employee's Line Manager.
- An acknowledgement letter is sent to the customer by the employee's Line Manager.
- Compliments for individuals are communicated internally to employees.

Monitoring the Complaints and Compliments System

Complaints and compliments are a major source of information about what people think of the services that the company provides. To make sure the system is working we will:

Undertake customer surveys of those who have made complaints covering:

- how easy is the complaints process to use
- how the complaint was handled
- the fairness of the reply
- satisfaction with the outcome

Undertake surveys of users and user groups covering:

- knowledge of the complaints system
- ease of access to the system

Undertake detailed analysis of the complaints process to highlight problem areas.

Produce an annual report on complaints and compliments detailing:

- the numbers and categories of complaints and compliments
- comparisons with previous years
- suggested actions for improvement

Reporting Arrangements and Annual Report

We will produce a quarterly report on complaints and compliments administration, which will include:

- the numbers and categories of complaints and compliments received
- the number of complaints resolved
- the number of complaints resolved within the target timescale
- the number of complaints deemed justified
- the changes to service provision arising from complaints and compliments
- any trends concerning complaints and compliments

An annual report on complaints and compliments administration will be presented to the Board of The Gateshead Housing Company.

Anonymous Complaints

It is helpful if complainants say who they are so that we can get in touch with them to clarify issues and give feedback on the outcome of their complaint. However, the company believes everyone has the right to complain and anonymous complaints will be thoroughly investigated. The complaint will remain confidential during investigation.

Data Protection

Under the terms of our Data Protection Statement we will keep personal data safe and secure. In addition:

- We will not share it with other organisations without consent, unless we are required by law to do so
- We may also use it for the prevention and detection of fraud

Persistent and Vexatious Complaints

Where a complainant persists in pursuing a complaint, which has no reasonable basis, or when the company has already taken reasonable action in response to the complaint the company will exercise its discretion as to when a matter will be regarded as closed and will not be reinvestigated.



RESOURCES AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

20 May 2010

PRESENT:

Directors

John Hamilton (Chair)
Richard Armitage
Stan Dawson
Peter Mole

Advisers

Bill Fullen	Chief Executive
Jon Mallen-Beadle	Director of Finance
Neil Bouch	Director of Housing Management
Paul Proud	Acting Director of Property and Technical Services
Kevin Johnson	Borough-Wide Housing Manager
Sarah Thompson	Finance Manager
Jennifer Aston	HR Manager
Jim Farquhar	Chief Auditor, Gateshead Council Internal Audit
Paul Bradley	Audit Manager, Gateshead Council Internal Audit
Susan McNair	Price Waterhouse Cooper
Stuart Gibson	Company Administrator

Apologies

Allan Curry
Paul Foy
Joachim Mouanda Moussounda
Sara Woolley

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 9 March were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 MATTERS ARISING – CYCLE TO WORK SCHEME

The committee was informed that an employee would have to take out their own personal insurance for using a bicycle whilst at work.

Gateshead Council had held two application periods for its cycle to work scheme with 48 and 28 employees respectively opting into the scheme in September and December 2009. The average spend on a bicycle is £700 per applicant.

4 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY UPDATE

The committee received an update on the company's ongoing work around equality and diversity.

In order to ensure that the company continues to make progress in this area of work and comply with relevant changes to legislation, it has undertaken an external assessment of its approach to equality and diversity.

Consultants were on site on 21 and 22 April 2010 and their initial findings proved very positive. The aim of this review is to identify areas where the company is continuing to maintain and improve on excellent services and to highlight the areas where it can make improvements.

The review will lead to a review of the original action plan attached to the Single Equality Scheme to ensure that the actions identified demonstrate outcomes for customers and employees and reflect the most recent changes to the Equality Act.

The Board was informed, at its meeting held on 17 March 2010, of the draft Social Housing Equality Framework to agree the company's response to the draft framework. Having previously achieved Level 3, in the Equality Standard, this automatically allows the company to migrate to the 'Achieving' level of the new framework for two years. However, this does not encourage the company to move forward with this work and push to achieve excellence to improve services and employment conditions for all.

In response to this, the company has agreed to take part in a pilot assessment against the new framework in summer 2010 to confirm that the company is meeting the achieving level and identify any outstanding work required to work towards excellence.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the progress of the company's work in relation to equality and diversity be noted.
- (ii) That the committee receive a report at its next meeting on the findings from the equality and diversity review.

5 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS – YEAR-END 2009/10

The management accounts for the financial year 2009/10, including the income and expenditure in relation to both revenue and repairs were submitted.

The accounts show an overall overspend of £72,000. This is due to a number of early retirements being funded at the year end, which will assist with the budgetary pressures in the current financial year.

Despite the £72,000 overspend the company's reserves are £610,095, of which to date £64,509 has been allocated to new build properties at St Cuthberts.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the information be noted.
- (ii) That future reports include a more detailed breakdown of repairs.

6 SICKNESS ABSENCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE

The committee received report for the year-end 2009/10 on sickness absence and an update on general human resources (HR) initiatives and developments.

The total sickness absence for the period April 2009 to March 2010 equated to 10.37 days (compared to 11.16 days for the period April 2009 to March 2010). This equates to a 7.1% decrease in days lost in the year.

The company set a target of 10 days absence per employee for the current financial year. The first quarter's performance made this very challenging but a number of initiatives have been introduced which have helped to achieve 10.37 days absence per employee. In the second half of the year, sickness absence was just 4.5 days.

In the period April 2006 to March 2007, sickness absence was 15.10 days per employee. This compares to 10.37 days for the period April 2009 to March 2010 and equates to a 31% improvement in a three year period.

Short term absence relates to periods of absence less than 15 working days in duration with long term absence greater than 15 days in duration. In the period April 2009 to March 2010, short term absence was 4.52 days and long term 5.86 days. This compares with 5.60 days short term absence and 5.56 days long term absence in the same period last year.

In the period, the biggest cause of absence was stress. However, initiatives to support employees in the year have resulted in a 43% reduction in stress related absence. 729.8 days were lost to stress as compared to 1273.5 days lost in the same period last year.

140 employees achieved 100% attendance in the period as compared with 137 in the same period last year. This equates to a 2% improvement.

The financial cost of sickness absence to the company for the year was £328,865 as compared to £465,019 last year.

The company has held 106 sickness counselling interviews in the period April 2009 to March 2010 triggered in response to four periods of absence or two periods of 15 days or more in a rolling 12 month period.

In the period, 42 cognitive behavioural therapy / counselling sessions were supported by the company and attended by four employees.

33 options interviews were arranged in the period and nine employees had a phased return to work.

On 6 April 2010, the sick note was replaced with the fit note where doctors will advise people who are absent due to sickness for seven days or more whether, with extra support from their employer, they could return to work.

The committee also received an update on the following human resources initiatives and developments: -

- Work life balance applications
- Investigation and disciplinary
- Capability
- Grievances
- Job Evaluation
- Recruitment
- Future Jobs Fund
- Work placements
- Personal Details Audit
- Probationary periods
- Health and wellbeing initiatives
- Guide for working parents.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

7 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY

The committee received an update on the following learning and development activity within the company from 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010: -

- Management Development Programme
- Funded NVQ training
- Qualifications
- Training Best Practice Group
- Coaching, information, advice and guidance
- Public Service Academy
- Supporting continuous development

In the period, 80 training programmes or events have been delivered, representing a total of 182 full days of training and an additional 255 hours of shorter courses or events. This equates to an average of four days training per employee per year. Further detail on the variety of courses delivered was reported.

Work will continue to access funding for training where eligibility is achieved and content contributes to the achievement of business priorities and objectives. Through increased partnership working with Health and Safety and ICT, a streamlined and integrated service will be provided which will maximise attendance on training programmes through consistently managing the whole training cycle across the company.

The Staff Development Team are working closely with the Senior Management Team and Project leads to identify training requirements resulting from the company priorities.

Appraisals will also be used to identify additional training needs and Staff Development will explore different interventions so that it is not always necessary for employees to attend a training course.

The Staff Development Team and HR colleagues are working together to prepare and deliver a course for customers to assist them in interview techniques, completion of application forms and general areas in relation to employment, including work placements. The first session will be delivered in June 2010 as part of the Moving Forward Customer training programme.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

8 FINAL EVALUATION OF MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The committee received details of the final evaluation of the Management Development Programme, which Turning Tides Ltd delivered 16 modules to 63 managers from June 2008.

The programme was accredited by the Open College Network, providing managers with a nationally recognised qualification – NOCN Level Three Award for Progression. 86% of managers achieved the full award.

Each module was evaluated immediately after its completion. The average scores for the whole programme were 16% excellent, 52% very good, 24% good, 5% satisfactory and 1% poor. Module 11 was Health and Safety. The feedback from this module indicated that managers used the session to identify areas where further information was required. This was picked up on a later module and also by the company's Health and Safety Advisor.

Turning Tides provided a resource pack to be used by the Staff Development Team for future training. As the largest proportion of the management team have benefited from this training, there is not the requirement for another programme of this nature or scale.

The Staff Development Team have however identified areas where managers who were not attendees of the programme or employees who aspire to management roles may benefit and are incorporating these into the company training programme. The first two will be leading a team and managing performance.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

9 NEW LEGISLATION 'TIME TO TRAIN'

The right to request 'time to train' applies to all employees in businesses with 250 employees or more from 6 April 2010. It will be extended to cover employees in all businesses from 6 April 2011. Employees can make requests to undertake any training which they believe will improve their effectiveness and improve the performance of the company. This can include accredited programmes leading to the award of a recognised qualification or shorter

unaccredited training to help develop specific skills relevant to their job, workplace or company.

The new legislation is focused on 'time to train' which means employees do not have the right to be paid for the time spent training when the request is approved. However, the company may wish to pay for their time recognising the value of the investment.

Employers are only required to consider one request from an employee in any twelve month period unless the employee has requested that a previous request is ignored. Employees can ask to undertake more than one piece of training in a single request. There is no limit on the amount of time or the amount of study or training that an employee can request.

Requests can be turned down when there is a good business reason to do so. A list of the business reasons are clearly set out. The new right closely follows the model used for agreeing requests under the flexible working arrangements.

A guidance document has been developed for employees to explain the new legislation and their rights with regards to 'time to train', details of which were reported.

The normal training request process is still available for employees to request training, seminars, conferences and qualifications funded by the company.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

10 EXIT INTERVIEWS

The committee received an update on progress with exit interviews.

In the period April 2009 to March 2010, 35 employees left the company. Of these, 16 exit interviews were held with an HR advisor.

General comments indicate that the majority of employees enjoyed working for the company. Employees were positive about promotion and advancement prospects. Employees were encouraged by the number of internal vacancies and expressions of interest and the recruitment process. Employees indicated they had a good relationship with colleagues and management. Employees would return to work for the company in the future.

Of the 16 exit interviews held, employees indicated a number of reasons for leaving, details of which were reported.

The HR Manager has followed up the concerns raised by an employee who stated poor relationship with management as a reason for leaving and appropriate action has been taken. 18 employees did not have an exit interview. All employees were contacted and given the opportunity of an exit interview with an option to complete the exit interview form without an HR advisor and return in the post.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

11 HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

The committee received an update on the following health and safety activities: -

- Risk Assessment Annual Review
- Gas Safety Policy
- Accidents
- Health and Safety training
- Asbestos management
- Fire safety
- Legionella control
- Management of passenger lifts
- DDA
- Cyclical repair and maintenance
- Overall safety performance audit for the partnering contractors.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

12 FORMER TENANT ARREARS – PROGRESS REPORT

The committee received a progress update on the performance improvements since the Former Tenant Team expanded by five employees from September 2009.

The amount of former tenant arrears outstanding at the end of the year had previously increased each year since the launch of the company, with the exception of 2007/08 when an unusually large write-off of £1.9 million was agreed with Gateshead Council.

In 2008/09, former tenant arrears increased by £157,955. However, with the increased resources and priority given to performance in 2009/10, former tenant arrears reduced by £114,527. Write-offs and volume of cases were almost identical to the previous year, which helps to highlight that this turnaround of £272,482 can be identified as a performance improvement on 2008/09.

The performance improvements were achieved through a large reduction in the amount of new debt created and by an increase in the amount of arrears recovered.

In 2008/09, salary costs for the former tenant team (with on-costs) were £76,055, producing collections of £177,973. In 2009/10, costs increased to approximately £106,000 and collections increased to £202,647.

If the expanded team had been in place for a full year, salary costs would have been £136,393. New appointments were not made until August and September and there was a subsequent two month period with a vacancy.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

13 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the committee will be held on Thursday 29 July 2010 at 10am in Board Room 2, Keelman House, Fifth Avenue Business Park, Fifth Avenue, Team Valley, Gateshead.

14 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the remaining business in accordance with indicated categories of the company's Access to Information Rules.



ASSET MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

25 June 2010

PRESENT:

Directors

Sara Woolley (Chair)
 Robert Buckley
 Pauline Dillon
 Kathryn Ferdinand
 Bill Patterson
 Jim Willis

Advisers

Bill Fullen	Chief Executive
Jon Mallen-Beadle	Director of Finance
Paul Proud	Acting Director of Property and Technical Services
Sarah Thompson	Finance Manager
Paul Marshall	Repairs Partnering Manager
Stuart Gibson	Company Administrator

Apologies

Allan Curry
 Stan Dawson
 Peter Mole

20 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting of the committee held on 26 November 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

21 GAS CARE PLAN

As part of the repair and maintenance contract, Morrison carries out annual gas servicing and responsive repairs to heating breakdowns.

Gas servicing is delivered as an annual programme with five fixed costs ranging from £23 to £43 depending on the type of appliance.

There is a schedule of rates in place for routine repairs to gas appliances. As breakdown repairs to gas appliances are purely responsive, it is very difficult to anticipate and control annual expenditure.

An alternative method of delivering gas servicing and repairs is to enter into a Gas Care Plan which fixes the annual cost. The company will pay Morrison a

fixed price per property to carry out an annual service and any responsive repairs.

Details of key elements included in the Plan were submitted. The Plan was also submitted.

The company currently pays £1,048,000 per year for Gas Servicing which includes the cost of the Access Squad.

The cost of heating out of order repairs was £1,485,080 in 2009/10. The projected cost of gas heating repairs and servicing in 2010/11 is approximately £2,500,000. This is based on historical volumes of repairs.

The negotiated rate for the Gas Care Plan is £95 per property with an addition of £35 per fire. Advice from Housing Quality Network is that a competitive price for a comparable service would be between £100 and £120. In the private sector, British Gas is charging £156 for a similar service (additional £100 for a fire).

The estimated annual cost of the Gas Care Plan is £2,000,000, a breakdown of which was reported.

The projected saving to the company of entering into the Gas Care Plan is £500,000 in 2010/11. In addition, the fixed price charge has enabled the company to transfer the uncertainty of expenditure on the demand led element (repair) to Morrison.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the introduction of the Gas Care Plan negotiated with Morrison be noted.
- (ii) That the Gas Service Manager be invited to the next meeting of the committee to give a presentation on the measure put in place by the company to gain access to properties.

22 CAPITAL BUDGET OUTTURN – 2009/10

The committee received a report on capital outturn against the budget for 2009/10.

The expenditure for 2009/10 is £62,630,000 against a revised budget of £62,628,000 and the outturn statement for the financial year was submitted.

An analysis of the Decent Homes portion of the capital budget broken down by strategic partner and an analysis of the Prudential Borrowing outturn by scheme were also submitted.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the information be noted.
- (ii) That arrangements be made for the committee to visit Wardley Bungalows.

23 RESPONSIVE REPAIRS ACTIVITY 2009/10

The committee received details of activity in the responsive repairs service during the financial year ended 31 March 2010.

There have been 73,210 responsive works orders invoiced from April 2009 to March 2010 (value £7.07m). This has reduced in comparison to 2008/09 where 79,491 responsive works orders were invoiced (value £10.497m).

The average job cost has reduced from £132.06 in 2008/09 to £96.62 in 2009/10. Details of the average cost per job, number of jobs invoiced and the cost of jobs invoiced for 2008/09 and 2009/10 split down by Area and Category of repair were reported. This shows that the number and cost of repairs in each area has fallen in 2009/10 which is consistent with the overall results. The committee also received a review of repairs by category.

An analysis of the cumulative value of the repair codes invoiced by Morrison shows that the highest value 15 codes relate to a total of 45.78% of the overall repair spend.

The top nine plumbing repairs make up 30.87% of overall repair spend. This is consistent with the increase in the number of emergency repairs due to the cold winter months which resulted in an increase in plumbing repairs in relation to boilers.

Daywork repairs are charged for additional work which the Schedule of Rates (SOR) code does not cover. They can be charged as an additional cost to a repair which has been carried out using an SOR code and the additional element only is charged as dayworks. They can also be charged to undertake works where there is no specific SOR code which covers the works required.

In relation to other repairs within the top 15, roofing repairs, electrical repairs, and glazing repairs are generally the most common type of repair and although they may not be costly the high number will increase the overall spend on these areas.

The subcontractor repairs are for instances where Morrison have had to use a specialist subcontractor to undertake the works as the works are outside the SOR codes. Specific instances of these are where scaffold is required. Morrison invoice the company for the subcontractor charges plus a management fee of 7.5% for these works.

A breakdown of the annual repairs expenditure and average cost per property undertaken by Morrison by estate was reported. This breakdown also includes the year that the decent homes work is due to be completed or whether it has already been completed. However, it has been found that there is no specific correlation between the decent homes work carried out and the repair spend.

The estate with the highest cost per property is Clasper Village at £519.82. The estate with the lowest cost is Mulgrave Villas at a cost per property of £43.65.

Further analysis of reasons for repairs has highlighted that the level of spend is generally dependent on the type of properties within the estates, the age of the properties and the type of repairs required.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

24 HOMELOANS ACTIVITY 2009/10

The committee was informed of the use of the HomeLoans Scheme within 2009/10.

During 2009/10, there were a total of 38 applications for HomeLoans. Of these, seven were refused due to the tenant having arrears, 11 are still pending and 20 applications were accepted and have been invoiced to tenants. A detailed analysis was reported.

From a review of the applications, it has been noted that the main areas that tenants appear to be applying for loans is in relation to a vehicle crossing and/or hardstand, there were 19 of these applications. There were seven applications for a shower installation and four applications for fencing. Other areas that tenants applied for loans were in relation to radiators, internal doors, fire and surround, intruder alarms and an outside tap.

The collective value of loans raised to tenants in 2009/10 was £16,739 which will be collected over the next 1-5 years.

The committee also received a breakdown of the types of HomeLoans that were accepted between 2004/05 and 2008/09. This shows that the number of HomeLoans which are accepted has been fairly constant over this period. This shows that the main reasons for tenants applying for and being accepted for a loan was for a vehicle crossing and/or hard stand, followed by showers and alarms. Over this period, loans were provided to the amount of £106,792.

The company is currently reviewing the HomeLoans procedures to ensure that they provide the most effective procedure for tenants so that they offer an affordable alternative to private works.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

25 RESPONSIVE REPAIRS VARIATIONS

The committee was advised of the responsive repairs variations which have been carried out and submitted by repairs contractor Morrison Facility Services (“MFS”).

The company currently has a contract with MFS to carry out responsive repairs which have been extended by up to two years (to 31 March 2012). The contract is based on the company paying for actual jobs completed through an agreed Schedule of Rates (SOR) listing which provides costs for a wide range of repair jobs. Any additional works required that are outside of this schedule are paid on a Dayworks rate or through a Subcontractor rate which is based on the actual costs incurred.

Whilst tenants and leaseholders have a variety of ways of reporting repairs, ultimately they are received by Customer Service Assistants (“CSA”) in the Repairs Reporting Centre, which can be accessed by freephone, text and email. Repair requests are diagnosed by CSA’s within the centre and the most appropriate SOR attached to the order. The CSA’s use the Repairs Diagnostic Toolkit to diagnose the repair using the information provided by the tenant, however, neither the CSA nor the tenant generally have a technical background. The repairs are categorised and the appropriate timescale is attached.

Once the repair has been diagnosed and categorised appropriately appointments are offered to customers. A works order is then raised with MFS or Local Environmental Services (LES) to carry out the repair. MFS carry out most of the internal and external repairs and LES carry out all of highway related repairs such as pavements repairs and drainage repairs.

The operatives then carry out the jobs allocated to them and sign off the actual job they have completed. Once the job is signed off it is then invoiced to the company.

The actual job completed by the MFS operative may differ from the original order raised by the CSA’s, which has the potential to create a variation in the amount invoiced by MFS.

Variations are inevitable as the repairs service is a customer focused service which ensures that it provides the best possible service to customers. If the company did not allow operatives to carry out variations then they would only be permitted to complete the work as detailed on their job allocation which may leave the customers unsatisfied and the repair only partially completed.

These variations can occur for a number of reasons, details of which were reported.

Prior to the ALMO being set up, over 80% of repair requests were pre-inspected. This is currently at approximately 5% of all of repairs and all potential renewal repairs are pre-inspected.

Pre-inspecting up to 80% of repair requests had a detrimental impact on performance as this extended the period in which repairs were carried out. In addition, analysis of variations at that time showed that around 20% of pre-inspected jobs were varied. Therefore, even when a large number of pre-inspections were carried out there was still a relatively high variation percentage. The 2009/10 variation rate lies at 8% which is down from 11% in 2008/09.

The Audit Commission’s advice on the volume of pre and post-inspections was to pre-inspect 5% and post-inspect 10% of repairs. The company aimed to post-inspect 10% of all repairs; however, this has recently been reduced to 5% due to a high level of satisfaction reported by customers and a minimal defect limit. It now uses the property inspectors to pre inspect the renewal elements within the SOR codes.

Analysis of the reasons for allowable variations has identified the following three main areas -

Incorrect SOR code raised by repairs reporting

An incorrect SOR can be raised for a number of reasons, however, the main reasons are due to an inaccurate report from the tenant in relation to what the repair relates to or the CSA misdiagnosing the repair and raising the incorrect SOR code. Although the CSA's use a sequence of questions to determine the nature of the repair, it is not always possible to fully determine the extent of the works required.

The company has undertaken a number of actions to try and rectify these variations. It has introduced Repair finder, which is our diagnostic software, this is a pictorial guide that allows the CSA to attach a SOR that is the closest match to the identified repair. This is then passed to MFS. The next phase of this guide is to develop it to be sent out to customers. The guide is currently available on the website for customers who report repairs on-line.

The company has undertaken work to amend the description of SOR codes to ensure that CSA's understand what work is covered by the SOR to try and reduce errors. The company is also holding additional training sessions with CSA's where errors are identified. This represents approximately 45% of all variations.

Additional follow on trade required

An additional follow on trade may be required where the initial work undertaken by MFS actually requires follow up work for example where a plumbing job has been carried out for a leak there may also be a requirement for a joiner to attend to complete the refixing of a kitchen or bathroom unit which has been affected by the leak or plumbing work. This additional work is generally not known at the time the order is raised.

The action in relation to this variation is to raise a separate order for the additional follow on work that is required. MFS view this as a variation because they feel the company should be able to obtain more information from the customer to identify if any other trades are required. However, technically this is not a variation and a new order should be raised for the follow on trade. The company is currently working with MFS to identify exactly what should and should not be included in their variation report. This will be discussed with MFS to ensure that this does not impact on the time taken to complete this repair to the detriment of the tenant. This represents approximately 21% of all variations.

Quantity required

A variation for quantities required can occur in areas where in general it can be difficult to determine the quantity required when the order is raised. An example of this is in the orders for plastering, fencing or bricklaying where the order will be raised based on the SOR code with the minimum quantity. However, when MFS attend the area to repair may actually fall into a different SOR code with a higher quantity and hence this would lead to a variation.

This is difficult to mitigate against as it can often be difficult for customers to explain how large the area of repair required and the area may be larger than the customer can actually see. Additional training can be provided to CSA's to

encourage them to try and obtain further information to attempt to get a closer SOR code match to the work required.

It is difficult to determine the quantities of work required in some areas such as plastering, fencing or bricklaying therefore orders are raised against a code with the lowest cost and the minimum quantity. This represents approximately 19% of all variations.

The company received an Internal Audit in November 2008 which found significant weaknesses in the repairs service. The high priority finding was that the invoices received from MFS were not verified sufficiently. Therefore, the company agreed to run reports showing committed cost against invoiced cost to highlight the variations. Work was then carried out to identify if the variation was justified.

A protocol was set up to deal with variations and monthly checking of these invoices is continuing until the variation module on Northgate Repairs has been implemented. Meetings are held with MFS to discuss any disputes over the variations.

Following this report, the company has put processes in place to review the invoices more rigorously and agreed with Morrison to split the invoices to ensure that they could be reviewed more closely.

The company has put processes in place to scrutinise all variations over £500 in detail to review whether these were acceptable. In 2009/10, all invoices for variations over £500 were withheld until a full analysis had been undertaken. From the total invoiced amounts of £349,375, credits have been received for £36,448.

The contract allows for variations under £100 being paid for by the company. Any variation over £100 can be scrutinised by the company and challenged before payment is made.

In 2008/09, all variations were assessed at the year end and discussions took place with Morrison to agree to the variations. This resulted in the company receiving a credit of £178,056 which is 12.5% of the variations over £500.

A summary of the variations which occurred in 2009/10 in relation to works carried out by MFS, these variations show that overall there were over 68,221 jobs raised in 2009/10 at an overall cost of £6,357,270.

The value and instance of the variations over £500 have reduced from 2008/09 to 2009/10. In 2008/09, renewals were carried out under the original repairs request and therefore, were charged as a variation to the repair raised and this increased the instance of the over £500 variation. In 2009/10, the company introduced an amended system for the renewals where the works are batched together and raised as a purchase order rather than through the repairs system.

During 2010/11 work will focus on reviewing repair variations between £100 and £500.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

26 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the committee will be held on Thursday 30 September 2010 at 9am in Board Room 1, Keelman House, Fifth Avenue Business Park, Fifth Avenue, Team Valley, Gateshead.

27 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the remaining business in accordance with the indicated category of the company's Access to Information Rules.

28 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 4 March 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.



Title: Keep Britain Tidy - Cleaner Safer Greener Quality Mark

Report of: Director of Housing Management

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of the report is to update the Board on the achievement of the Keep Britain Tidy, Cleaner Safer Greener quality mark at Exemplar level.

Background

2. Keep Britain Tidy are the awarding body for the ***Cleaner Safer Greener (CSG) Quality Mark***. This Quality Mark was developed as an external assessment tool for use by housing providers and is designed to support the provision of cleaner, safer and greener communities.
3. The Quality Mark can be sought for at three levels:
 - 1: Initiator
 - 2: Performer
 - 3: Exemplar

Exemplar is the highest level and involves participating organisations to demonstrate that the specific neighbourhoods going for the award, are a place where the housing provider and its partners are achieving the residents' vision for a cleaner, safer and greener environment, which is respected by those who live, work and visit the neighbourhood.

4. Housing providers going for Exemplar level must be able to evidence that a high performing partnership is in place which seeks to sustain and continually improve the quality of life within the neighbourhood through a demonstrable track record of innovation and best practice.
5. Applications for the award are to be for a small neighbourhood, estate or area. The award achieved relates to the Wrekenton Communities Matter area which includes Beacon Lough East, Seven Stars and Springwell estates.
6. During April 2010, the Partnership was awarded the highest level of the Cleaner Safer Greener Quality Mark, Exemplar. The assessors commented that, "Staff understand their role in making improvements and are committed to working with residents and partner organisations. There is a willingness to tackle issues."

Applying for the Quality Mark

7. In partnership with Gateshead Council and Northumbria Police the housing company and other agencies had to provide evidence around the five key areas of:

- 1: Vision and Values
- 2: Strategic Planning
- 3: Partnership
- 4: Resident Involvement
- 5: Key performance areas

The agencies that worked in partnership with us and supported the achievement are highlighted in the Appendix to this report.

8. In addition to providing evidence in the five key areas listed , the housing company and partners had to demonstrate activities and evidence of partnership working in areas such as safer communities, grounds maintenance, environmental issues and good citizenship.
9. During 2009/10 the following key stages were undertaken to achieve the Quality Mark status: -

(I): Registration:

The partnership was established in March 2009 between Gateshead Council and The Gateshead Housing Company to apply and achieve the Quality Mark.

(II): Running a 'How To' Workshop:

Keep Britain Tidy facilitated a 'How To' workshop with partner agencies and residents in the area and visited the estates. The workshop provided practical advice and support for officers and customers in order to identify what level of the accreditation to apply for.

(III): Completing the Workbook:

The partnership had to gather evidence, complete an evidence workbook and self assessment document to say how we are meeting the five key areas of the quality mark.

(IV): Submitting the Workbook:

The evidence and workbook were submitted to assessors of Keep Britain Tidy for a desk top assessment.

(V): Assessment Process:

Assessors carried out an onsite visit on the three estates which included estate walk-about, meeting customers and front line officers, and interviewing customers, officers and partners.

Customer Involvement

10. During the application for the Quality Mark, local customers, members of the community and local agencies were involved and consulted with to help develop a Neighbourhood plan for Beacon Lough East, Seven Stars and Springwell estates.
11. The Neighbourhood Plan identifies the key priorities to local people on the Beacon Lough East, Seven Stars and Springwell estates around the themes of cleaner, safer and greener. This plan will be presented to the Wrekenton Community Partnership meeting in July for approval, who will also monitor the progress against the priorities. The impact of the plan will then be shared with local tenants and residents groups.

Benefits to the Community and Partnership

12. The Quality Mark will benefit directly the Wrekenton Community Partnership and the Neighbourhood Agreement work underway in those areas. It will also benefit the wider community and partnership by establishing a framework and a learning mechanism that can be applied elsewhere in the borough.
13. Some of the identified benefits from the Quality Mark are as follows;
 - It demonstrates the quality of service to stakeholders, partners and neighbourhoods
 - It builds credibility and opportunities for funding support
 - It promotes innovation and good practice amongst peers
 - It helps the partnership identify and implement improvement actions
 - It supports and strengthens tenant and resident engagement

Impact on customers

14. The achievement of the Cleaner Safer Greener Quality Mark has a positive impact on customers. The Neighbourhood Plan will look to address and meet their local priorities for Beacon Lough East, Seven Stars and Springwell estates around cleaner, safer and greener themes.
15. The Quality Mark also helped to build upon the existing strong partnership between the services and agencies operating within the area; this will also have a positive impact for customers in the area and across the borough.

Risk management implications

16. There are no risk management implications directly arising from this report.

Link to values

17. This report relates to the following company values: -
 - Being customer focused, innovative and professional.
 - Being a listening and learning organisation.

Health Implications

18. The existing partnership, lead up work and preparation for the Cleaner Safer Greener Quality Mark has had positive impacts on customers' health and wellbeing. This has been achieved through the strong partnerships that are making Gateshead cleaner and safer to live in, whilst numerous activities worked towards enhancing the environmental and green spaces.

Financial Implications

19. There are no financial implications arising from the Cleaner Safer Greener Quality Mark. The cost of the award (£1,995) was shared between the housing company and Gateshead Council.

Equality and Diversity Implications

20. There are no equality and diversity implications arising from the Cleaner Safer Greener Quality Mark

Value for Money implications

21. The application and achievement of the quality mark was shared between the company and Gateshead council. This helped to demonstrate value for money in both the costs and achievement of the Quality Mark.

Environmental Impact

22. The achievement of the Cleaner Safer Greener Quality Mark has significant positive environmental impacts. The very nature of the Exemplar award demonstrates the positive work both the housing company and partners are doing around making estates cleaner and greener through the provision of numerous services and environmental initiatives and projects.

Recommendation

23. The Board is recommended to: -
- note the achievement of the Keep Britain Tidy, Cleaner Safer Greener quality mark at Exemplar level.
 - recognise and thank everyone involved.

Appendix: List of partners and stakeholders

The Gateshead Housing Company:

- Housing Management
- Wrekenton Housing
- Operational Support
- Neighbourhood Relations Team
- Decent Homes

Customers:

- Numerous customers from Beacon Lough East, Seven Stars and Springwell Estates.

Partners:

- Local Environmental Services (Gateshead Council)
- Neighbourhood Warden Services (Gateshead Council)
- Northumberland Police
- Neighbourhood Management Team (Gateshead Council)
- Youth and Community Learning (Gateshead Council)