



The Gateshead Housing Company

Working with Gateshead Council

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

18 September 2014

PRESENT:

Directors

Barbara Dennis (Chair)
Sheila Boutieh
Robert Buckley
Joanne Carr
George Clark
Mick Davison
Pauline Dillon
Kathryn Ferdinand
Eileen Gill
Helen Hall
Peter Mole
Joachim Moussounda Mouanda

Advisers

Jon Mallen-Beadle	Managing Director
Neil Bouch	Director of Customers and Communities
Natalie Hewitt	Head of Corporate Services
Phil Gallagher	Head of Investment and Development
Julie McCartney	Head of Neighbourhood Services
Kevin Johnson	Head of Customer Services
Stuart Gibson	Governance and Risk Officer

Also Present

Elizabeth Bird

Apologies

Paul Foy
John Hamilton
Gordon Spring

42 MINUTES

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on 14 July 2014 were approved as a correct record, subject to duplication of Mick Davison's name in the list of those present being deleted.

43 MATTERS ARISING – HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2013-14

The Company's concerns regarding the debt cap have been fed into the Northern Housing Consortium when it met in the summer.

44 BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Gordon Spring announced at the Annual General Meeting on 19 September 2013 that he would be retiring as a Tenant Director at the Annual General Meeting in September 2014.

A comprehensive recruitment campaign, including a Taster Session delivered by the Managing Director, took place during July 2014. Four applications were received and three applicants were shortlisted for interview in September 2014, though one of these withdrew prior to the interview.

The interview panel consisted of the Barbara Dennis, John Hamilton and Robert Buckley recommended that Elizabeth Bird be appointed at the Annual General Meeting as a Tenant Director.

Elizabeth has been a member of TALISMAN (Tenant and Leasehold Independent Scrutiny Management) since it was established in 2012. Helen Hall and Sheila Bouitieh, who were also members of TALISMAN when it was established, were appointed onto the Board in July 2013.

RESOLVED – That Elizabeth Bird be appointed as a Tenant Director at the Annual General Meeting.

45 RISK APPETITE

The Board agreed, at its meeting held on 8 July 2010, an updated Risk Management Policy. Within the Policy it outlines that the Board's role is to determine the Company's appetite for risk and that this should be reviewed annually.

The Company's third risk appetite statement was agreed at the meeting of the Board held on 19 September 2013 and it is proposed that given the current economic climate that statement should remain the same.

Given that the company is a public sector organisation, accountable to the residents of Gateshead and manages homes on behalf of Gateshead Council, the Company's appetite for taking risk is low. There could however be instances when its appetite for taking a risk may be different, for example for special projects or new ventures. Any decisions would be subject to Board approval.

The following risk appetite statement is therefore proposed: -

"The Gateshead Housing Company's appetite for taking risk is low, however there may be occasions when its appetite may increase for example for specific projects or new ventures. Any such increase would be subject to Board approval."

RESOLVED – That the risk appetite statement be approved and the statement be reviewed annually.

46 TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER ANNUAL REVIEW 2013/14

The Board received a draft Tenant and Leaseholder Annual Review 2013/14 which has been produced by a working group of tenants, leaseholders and members of the Company's involvement and communications teams.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the draft Tenant and Leaseholder Annual Review 2013/14 be approved.
- (ii) That the final report be produced and issued to all tenants and leaseholders with the October newspaper and be made available on the website and by request.

(Sheila Bouitieh and Helen Hall declared a non-pecuniary interest due to being on the working group that produced the Annual Review).

47 MINUTES OF CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2014

The minutes of the meeting of Customers and Communities Committee held on 11 September 2014 were submitted.

It was noted that the Committee was extremely pleased with the work carried out by TALISMAN.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the minutes be noted.
- (ii) That the Vexatious Contacts Guide be approved and the Managing Director speak to the Council about sharing the information.

48 MINUTES OF RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 9 SEPTEMBER 2014

The minutes of the meeting of Resources Committee held on 9 September 2014 were submitted.

- RESOLVED – That the minutes be noted, subject to more information being included in the minutes to reflect the amount of discussion around the management accounts and HR and sickness absence update.

49 MINUTES OF KEELMAN HOMES HELD ON 14 JULY 2014

The minutes of the meeting of Keelman Homes held on 14 July 2014 were submitted.

It was noted that since the last meeting of Keelman Homes, Kibblesworth won the NFA Award for Best New Build Category.

- RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

50 PERFORMANCE – FIRST QUARTER 2014/15

The Board was informed of the following first quarter performance results for 2014/15: -

- 23 indicators were traffic lighted green, which showed that the annual targets had been achieved for these indicators. This was a slight decrease from 24 in the first quarter 2013/14.
- Three indicators were traffic lighted amber, which showed that the target set had not been met but performance had improved on the previous year. This was an increase from two in the first quarter 2013/14.
- Eight indicators were traffic lighted red, which showed that the target set had not been met and performance had fallen compared to the previous year. This was an increase from six indicators in the first quarter 2013/14.
- 11 indicators were not yet measurable/baseline year.

The analysis therefore indicated that at the first quarter, performance relating to 26 out of the 34 measureable performance indicators were traffic lighted as on target or improving, which related to 76% of indicators. This was a slight decrease in performance compared to the first quarter 2013/14 when 81% of indicators were on target or improving.

The Board felt that more emphasis should be placed on what the Company was doing to address the dissatisfaction with the outcome of complaints or the way in which they were handled rather than referring to it being a small sample. It was noted that there was now a new customer Complaints Panel in place and the Board had recently agreed an updated Complaints Policy.

The Board felt that generally more emphasis needed to be placed on them scrutinising the reds. Where performance was on target, it was felt that the Board did not need all the supplementary information and felt that this could be posted on the website instead.

It was noted that the performance report was written in a format to suit what was required by the Council. The Managing Director agreed to speak to the Council about how they scrutinised the Company's performance.

- RESOLVED –
- (i) That the performance results at the first quarter of 2014/15 be noted.
 - (ii) That the Managing Director speak to the Council about how they scrutinise the Company's performance.
 - (iii) That a Board Task Group be set up to look at what it would like in terms of performance.

51 SERVICE STANDARD PERFORMANCE – FIRST QUARTER 2014/15

The Board was informed of the following first quarter performance results against the Company's service standards for 2014/15: -

- 24 indicators were traffic lighted green, which showed the targets set for them had been met. This was a slight decrease when compared to the first quarter 2013/14 when 26 indicators achieved the targets set.
- Two indicators were traffic lighted amber, which showed that the target set had not been met but performance had improved from the previous year. This was an improvement on performance in the first quarter of 2013/14 when there were no amber indicators.
- Five indicators were traffic lighted red, which showed that the targets set had not been met and performance had reduced from the previous year. This was compared to four in the first quarter 2013/14.
- 22 indicators were not measurable against a target at the first quarter.

Overall, performance relating to 26 out of the 31 measurable service standard performance indicators could be traffic lighted as on target or improving, which related to 84% of the indicators. This was comparable with performance for the first quarter 2013/14 when 87% of indicators were on target or improving.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the service standard performance results at the first quarter 2014/15 be noted.
- (ii) That the Board Task Group to look at what they would like in terms of performance also look at service standard performance.

52 LETTINGS REPORT 2013/14

The Board received details of lettings activity in 2013/14.

At the start of April 2013 there were 9,671 applicants on the Tyne and Wear Housing Register that had requested assessment for housing in Gateshead (out of 32,052 applicants across the whole scheme). By the end of March 2014, this had increased to 12,778 applicants requesting Gateshead (out of 38,319 on the whole scheme).

1,746 properties were let to applicants on the Housing Register in 2013/14, compared to 1,451 in 2012/13.

Whilst numbers of new applications remains high, the increase in refusals has resulted in properties becoming more difficult to let. In general applicants are getting housed with less waiting time and lower priorities, and more properties have to be re-advertised. This trend of increased numbers of refusals has been mirrored by the other Tyne and Wear authorities.

165 mutual exchanges took place in 2013/14, which was an increase from 140 the previous year.

The report had earlier been scrutinised by Customers and Communities Committee at its meeting on 11 September 2014.

The Board was informed that the increasing number of refusals included an increasing number of people bidding for areas they didn't want. It was noted

that the Company was now carrying out multi-viewings and can record the number of refusals in one visit.

Concern was expressed that some tenants were being advised that they had to keep bidding regularly. It was noted that it maximised your chances of being successful but you weren't penalised if you didn't bid. It would be clarified exactly what advice tenants were being given.

The Board asked if the downsizing policy could be re-examined and particular reference was given to tenants in 3-bedroom houses wanting to downsize to 2-bed bungalows.

It was noted that an open day was taking place to promote the redesignation/reclassification of flats in Redheugh and Eslington Court.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the information be noted.
- (ii) That clarification be sought about what advice tenants are being given around bidding for properties.

53 RENT ARREARS MONITORING AND PREVENTION

The Board received an update on rent arrears monitoring for the 2013/14 and details of the Company's approach to rent arrears prevention. In particular, information was provided around the following: -

- Current rent arrears
- Under 25's
- Former tenant arrears
- Welfare Reform
- Under occupation
- Discretionary Housing Payment
- Universal Credit
- Advice and Support Officers
- Energy Angels

The report had earlier been scrutinised by Customers and Communities Committee at its meeting on 11 September 2014.

The Board felt that one of the reasons for the BME tenants being in higher arrears could be due to them not understanding the policy.

The Board made the point that under-25s are more likely to have benefits taken off them quicker. This was a very serious problem that needed highlighting.

It was stressed that during the TALISMAN review of voids, it had been noted that although performance had gone down it hadn't gone down as quickly as in other organisations.

- RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

54 KEELMAN HOMES NEW BUILD – UPDATE

The Board received an update on the current two phases of new build activity for Keelman Homes.

There are 15 units currently being developed in Phase 1 of works, utilising developers grant and working in partnership with Esh Construction Services. All properties in this phase of works are expected to be complete within the current financial year to comply with HCA grant conditions.

The re-built unit at 73 Marian Court, Teams, which had previously been the site of a one bed bungalow has now transferred into Keelman Homes ownership. This property was completed in June, three months ahead of schedule and has now been advertised and let on with an affordable rent set at £75.92 per week.

Phase 2 of the New Build programme proposes to provide 29 units across two sites in the West of the borough at the former Lonnen Sheltered Scheme site and a cleared garage site on the Runhead Estate.

Following planning determination being issued on the Lonnen Site, the works commenced at the beginning of June with a draft programme targeting completion in early 2015. The site will include a mix of social rents (14 units) and private sales (6 units).

Extensive site investigation works at the Runhead site identified an electrical diversion which has had an impact on the programme. Additionally the developer has recently had confirmation from Northumbrian Water that there is a sewerage drain cutting across the site which will either need to be diverted or will compromise the number of units than can be achieved on the site.

Planning determination was granted on 15 May 2014 and the site has already been declared surplus and transfer of the site at nil value is imminent.

The service issues identified are currently being discussed with the developer and options being revisited together with revised timescales for the scheme.

In January 2014, the Homes and Communities Agency announced the bidding round for the 2015-2018 round of the Affordable Homes Programme with bids invited from developers for confirmed sites that would be developed during this window.

A number of sites were considered through the joint TGHC and Council working group and following discussion with the HCA a bid was submitted prior to the end of April 2014.

Having discussed the various sites and proposals at length with the local HCA officers, it was recommended that due to uncertainties about the programming of the Clasper Village and Bleach Green regeneration sites, that these should not feature in the bid as firm schemes but should be approached via the continuous market engagement route once a developer has been identified via the Council.

Keelman Homes was notified in July 2014 that it had been successful in its bid to the HCA and grant has been secured to progress with the schemes. This confirmed grant will support the provision of 45 affordable units, with 18 purchase and repair properties and 27 new build units. Work is currently underway to firm up designs and progress with transfers and planning on these sites to ensure activity can commence in April 2015 in line with the proposed programme.

Discussions with the HCA have indicated that there is likely to be an opportunity to consider further sites as and when they become available through continuous market engagement. Work is ongoing to look at additional sites.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

55 TGHC COMMUNITY FUND ANNUAL REVIEW 2013/14

The Board received an overview of the work delivered through the TGHC Community Fund in 2013/14.

Over £61,000 has been awarded through the Community Fund in 2013/14 including both cash and in kind projects during 2013/14 supporting 22 local community projects and charities. This included 15 cash grants and seven in kind projects.

The Board was pleased to see how many young persons groups were receiving grants and suggesting approaching them about getting more involved with the Company.

RESOLVED – (i) That the information be noted.

(ii) That the young persons groups that have received grants be approached about getting more involved with the Company.

(Note: Pauline Dillon declared a non-pecuniary interest due to be a member of Community Fund Group)

(Note: Robert Buckley declared a non-pecuniary interest due to his involvement in Dunston Drop-In)

56 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

The following items had been downloaded on the Company's website: -

- Petitions Update
- Outstanding Issues
- Forward Plan

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

57 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next Board Meeting will be held on Thursday, 20 November 2014 at 10am in the Blaydon Room, Gateshead Civic Centre.

58 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.