



The Gateshead Housing Company

Working with Gateshead Council

RESOURCES COMMITTEE

4 November 2014

PRESENT:

Directors

John Hamilton (Chair)
Sheila Bouitieh
Elizabeth Bird
Robert Buckley
George Clark
Mick Davison

Advisers

Jon Mallen-Beadle	Managing Director
Natalie Hewitt	Head of Corporate Services
Jennifer Aston	Support Services Manager
Louise Taylor	Involvement and Diversity Manager
Deborah Ewart	Housing Services Manager
Stuart Gibson	Governance and Risk Officer

Apologies

Kathryn Ferdinand

23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were declared.

24 MEMBERSHIP

The membership of the committee was noted.

Elizabeth Bird was welcomed to her first meeting since being appointed onto the Board as a Tenant Director.

25 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting of the committee held on 9 September 2014 were approved as a correct record.

26 DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY AND GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYERS AND MANAGERS

The Committee received an updated domestic abuse policy and guidance for employees and managers.

Locally there were over 5,000 domestic incidents reported to Northumbria Police during 2013/14. This figure does not take into account the many unreported incidents.

Domestic abuse is not an issue which can be ignored whilst at work and the impact on victims could easily manifest itself in the workplace. This policy and guidance demonstrates the Company's commitment to its employees and that it will take all reasonable steps to tackle domestic abuse and ensure its employees are safe.

It is therefore important that as an organisation we have a policy which reflects both national and local developments and provides employees and managers with appropriate information, support and advice about tackling domestic abuse. The workplace can be a lifeline for survivors of domestic abuse as it offers the opportunity to seek help. Providing the appropriate support for employees to remain in work can support their well-being over the long term.

The key aims of the policy and guidance include the following: -

- Raising awareness of domestic abuse employee champion scheme
- Demonstrating that TGHC will not tolerate domestic abuse
- Encouraging employees to seek appropriate support
- Providing a clear and consistent approach to employees
- Providing guidance around actions where an employee is proven to be a perpetrator of domestic abuse
- Ensuring line managers understand the importance of their role

It was clarified to the Committee that although the Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor is employed by Gateshead Council they give impartial advice and support to anyone and look at the individual needs rather than being service specific.

RESOLVED – That the Board be recommended to introduce the Domestic Abuse Policy and Guidance for Employers and Managers within TGHC, subject the fact that the men can also experience domestic abuse from their female partner and that domestic abuse also occurs in same sex relationships be highlighted in bold in the Policy.

27 TRANSFER OF ACCOUNTS – FORMER TENANTS' ARREARS

Periodically, the Council transfers former tenants arrears considered irrecoverable into a debtors account.

In 2013/14, a total amount of £512,528 owed by 3,438 former tenants was transferred in two instalments of £82,934 and £429,594.

During this financial year, the sum of £122,152 has been recovered from former tenants, including £13,020 relating to previously transferred accounts, which have been reinstated for recovery purposes.

Using the agreed criteria, it is proposed that 647 cases totalling £369,118 in value should be recommended for transfer.

There are currently 276 cases where tenants have been declared bankrupt or have applied for debt relief orders and debts on their rent accounts have been transferred to separate bankruptcy accounts. The total outstanding on these accounts is £320,591. None of the debts on bankruptcy accounts have previously been transferred to a debtors account.

Using the criteria that bankruptcy debts are discharged after one year from the date of judgement, it is proposed that 256 cases totalling £301,229 in value should be recommended for transfer.

RESOLVED – That Gateshead Council be recommended to transfer £369,118 of former tenants' arrears and £301,229 of bankruptcy debts to a debtors account.

28 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS – SECOND QUARTER 2014/15

The Committee received an update on the management accounts for the second quarter of the financial year 2014/15.

The Management Accounts Revenue shows a surplus for the second quarter of £245,000. This is due to an increase in income from properties owned by TGHC, slippage on vacant posts and overhead budgets where spend will not be realised until later in the year.

There is a £292,000 under spend on employee costs. This is mainly due to slippage on vacant posts.

The overhead costs are over budget by £4,000 to the second quarter. This is mainly due to additional costs incurred for rent at the Civic Centre and Keelman House costs.

At the year end, it is being forecast that the revenue budget will have an overall surplus of £19,000 for the revenue budget.

The overall position for repairs at the end of the second quarter is an under spend of £593,000. Although the position would suggest that spend is reducing since last year, there are still some areas of concern within the budget and an overspend by £357,000 is being forecasted by the end of the financial year.

Prelims paid to Mears are expected to come in over budget due to unrealised efficiency savings on behalf of Mears. Control measures that were put in place to slow down and hold back some elements of planned responsive repairs have started to have an impact, this along with the additional budget transferred from Mears specialist means the responsive repairs budget is under spent by £216,000 in the second quarter. However with the winter months still to come, when traditionally repair requests are expected to increase, spend to budget is being forecasted at the year end.

The Committee expressed concern about this and it was explained that whilst it is currently being forecast that spend in relation to fixed costs will be £408,000 over budget due to the budgeted efficiencies not being achieved within the Mears contract, the Company is in discussions with Mears around potential changes to pension contributions. It is expected that this contribution will offset the overspend.

Although relets are currently underspent by £113,000, it is being forecast that spend will come in on budget by the year end.

It was noted that there would be a presentation on the extension of the repairs contract with Mears at the Board Meeting on 20 November 2014.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

29 SICKNESS ABSENCE AND HR UPDATE

The Committee received an update on general HR initiatives and developments from April to September 2014, including sickness absence and learning and development activity.

The total sickness absence for the period equates to 4.13 days per person compared to 3.52 days for the same period last year which is an increase of 14.76%

Short term absence is defined as a period of less than 15 working days in duration and long term absence is greater than 15 days in duration. Short term absence for the period was 1.74 days per person and long term absence was 2.39 days. This compares with 1.45 days short term absence and 2.07 days long term absence for the same period last year. This represents an increase of 16.67% in short term absence and an increase of 13.39% in long term absence.

The biggest cause of absence for the period was Stress related with 422 days lost compared to 145 days lost last year. This is an increase of 65.64%.

258 days of stress related absence was reported as non-work related stress. This equates to 61.14% as non-work related absence and 38.86% work related absence.

Of the 422 days lost to stress related absence 10 employees reported non-work related stress and six employees reported work related stress

Post operation related absence was 305.70 days for the period compared to 352.60 days for the same period last year. This equates to a 15.34% decrease.

The Company has held 19 short term sickness absence review meetings in the period and resulted in three first written cautions were issued and one final written caution being issued. 17 long term absence review meetings were also held.

The committee received details of other HR initiatives and developments including work life balance, investigation and disciplinary, probity, recruitment and Employment Law updates.

The committee also received details of learning and development activity, including training delivered, sharing best practice, The Sunday Times Best 100 Companies and Health and Safety/ICT training.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

30 HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the following health and safety activities for the period April to September 2014: -

- Partner activity
- Accident reporting
- Asbestos management
- Fire safety management
- Legionella control
- Fire alarm systems and sprinkler system
- Emergency lighting
- Non-domestic gas boilers
- Wet and dry riser tests and inspections
- Bin Cute fire shut tests and inspections
- Lighting protection inspection
- Ventilation
- Cyclical repair and maintenance
- Lit maintenance
- Company Construction Related Activities
- Health and Safety Legislation changes

The Board, at its meeting in July 2014, approved a number of proposals relating to the future delivery of the Health and Safety function following the departure of the Health and Safety Manager. It was also used to assist with health and safety going beyond the advisory role and having expertise to deliver a corporate approach.

To address these issues, the Company has been working with Gateshead Council on detailed proposals and details of these were reported.

The Committee asked why fire alarm tests of two quarterly inspections of multi-storey blocks were cancelled and the actions taken to remedy this. It also asked what a weekly fire alarm test comprised and if there was a written procedure or guide.

The Committee expressed concern about 16 multi-storey blocks failing lightning protection tests and requested more information.

- RESOLVED – (i) That health and safety update be noted.
- (ii) That members of the committee be provided with a response to the queries outlined above.

31 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY – UPDATE

The Committee received a summary of equality and diversity work within the organisation in the second quarter of 2014/15.

The Company continues to collect about its customers to ensure that it understands the makeup of the community it delivers services to and a summary of the customer base as at September 2014 was reported.

In the last report, it was noted that guidance and training has been delivered to employees to equip them to deal effectively with reports of hate crime. During the last period, the Company has continued to focus on this area, ensuring that its approach meets the needs of people affected by hate crime to encourage them and give confidence to report incidents to the company or our partners.

One of the priorities of the Safer Gateshead Partnership was to increase reporting from the LGBT community, recognising that incidents were likely to be currently under-reported. In July 2014, the company attended the annual Newcastle Pride event in Exhibition Park which attracts thousands of LGBT people and their family and friends. This opportunity was used to collect information about people's experiences of hate crime and how this was handled by organisations if they reported it, or to find out the reasons why they may not have reported it.

The Company has continued to work with customers on a range of issues to help improve the way it tailors services to deal with customers' needs and examples of these were reported.

The Company continues to be a member of a number of equality networks and partnerships which helps ensure it keeps up to date with relevant policy and changes to legislation as well as sharing and learning from good practice.

The Single Equality Scheme is currently due for review and initial work took place with customers about some of the priorities that this should include.

It is proposed that further work is carried out with customers, linking this with the overall planning process for the organisations' future priorities in order to produce a new strategy for the financial year. It is also suggested that this strategy would cover inclusion issues as well as equality and diversity.

Further information will be brought to a future committee including the draft strategy for approval.

The Committee asked if the cost of increases in tenants with mobility problems etc and the effect that this had on the repairs budget could be quantified. It was noted that this would be very difficult but was acknowledged that this was something that Officers would look into.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted.

32 HOUSEMARK BENCHMARKING RESULTS 2013/14

The Committee received a report on the Company's cost and performance information as detailed in the HouseMark 'Summary of Benchmarking Results 2013/14' report.

A Value for Money and Performance Summary includes overheads, major works and cyclical maintenance, responsive repairs and voids, housing management and estate services.

Cost and performance data is categorised into quartiles. They include Upper, Middle Upper, Median, Middle Lower, Lower, Not Applicable and No Data.

Traffic lights have now been replaced with new refreshed icons to demonstrate performance, however, it should still be acknowledged that average or higher than average costs may be acceptable or desirable where this is consistent with furthering business objectives, performance or user satisfaction.

For 2013/14, HouseMark have also developed a Value for Money scorecard that can be used as a business effectiveness tool to help understand and challenge organisational performance and rates of improvement.

The Committee discussed in detail whether the current membership of approximately £18,000 per year with HouseMark offered value for money. Concern was expressed that none of the benchmarking was with other colleagues in the North East. It was noted that the Northern Housing Consortium were already producing similar information which would be comparable.

The Committee felt that the Company should be benchmarking its performance with other organisations but that it should be more local. It was also stressed however a number of local comparable organisations had now been stock transferred. The Committee felt that there was benefit also comparing with Registered Providers of a similar size.

A point was made that it was more important about learning from benchmarking and building this into service improvements. Concern was expressed that there was nothing in this report to indicate what the Company was doing to address the areas where performance was in the lower quartile. The Committee received a reassurance that service managers were using this information to help shape services.

RESOLVED – That the information be noted and link to the HouseMark report be sent to all Board Members.

33 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on Tuesday, 24 February 2015 at 2pm in Room S21 at Gateshead Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead.

34 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 Category 1 of the Company's Access to Information Rules.

35 MINUTES (Category 1)

The minutes of the last meeting of the committee held on 9 September 2014 were approved as a correct record.